



# Information Lifecycle

By Bernard Chester

All information has a life within and without the organization that creates it. It is born, matures, has an active life, and, often, dies. As with men, a particular piece of information ("content") may have a very different journey from the next, but tends to fit one or more lifecycle patterns, built from six distinct stages. There are a number of different schemes for naming these stages: the one I prefer is anthropomorphic.

The first stage, Birth, represents the creation of content. Content could be created in one of several ways: due to a business transaction, an individual author's actions, or having received a document from another organization.

In the second stage, Childhood, content achieves maturity. This is the period during which documents are reviewed and revised, and business transactions transition through a number of steps until completion.

Third stage, Teenage, is the point where the content has matured. It is approved for display on the Internet, or the transaction has completed. The assumption is that, from this point forward, the information will not change, although the way it is formatted, stored, or displayed may. At this point, if it is to become a record, it is declared.

The fourth stage of life is best labeled Adulthood. This is the stage when the content is actively being referenced. It is possible that content's context may change during this period. For example, access to the document may change based upon the lapse of time, or as a response to its participation in a process. For example, if the content is involved in case management, access may change depending on the status of the overall case.

The fifth stage, Retirement, occurs when the information becomes out-dated or no longer actively useful, but it still needs to be

retained. The media it resides on may be boxed and moved into a storage facility, or if electronic, it may be moved to near-line or off-line storage using an electronic storage management solution.

When documents and records come to the end of their lives, there are two possible fates. Their final stage can be either Death or Immortality, determined by the record retention plan. Most will be scheduled for proper destruction, but those with long-term or historic value will be maintained in an archive. Content destruction should be performed according to agreed procedures and with the owner's agreement. If the content is to be archived, procedures are applied to maintain the content in a format and on media that can live and be read for an extended period.

These stages will be combined in different ways to implement lifecycles that match organizational business processes. In some cases, they may avoid one or more stages, like skipping information review.

A number of roles can be involved in the information lifecycle. These include:

- Author: While often viewed as a single individual, content may have several authors, possibly enabled by a collaborative system.
- Reviewer: Reviewers provide comments and suggestions about the content while it is in draft. Alternatively, they may perform steps in a transaction workflow. They may or may not have approval rights for the content to be published or released.
- Publisher: The person or system that is responsible for certifying the content as complete, releasing it to a larger audience, or final completion of the transaction. A webmaster would have this role for Internet content.
- Record Manager or Administrator: This is the person who manages access to

*"All that lives must die, passing through nature to eternity"*  
— Hamlet, Act I, Scene 4

*".. One man in his time plays many parts ..."*  
— As You Like It, Act II, Scene 7

the information. This includes decisions about when and what content moves to inactive storage or is destroyed.

- End User: The individual(s) who reads or uses the information after it is published.

A number of familiar tools exist to manage the stages of information life, both intra-stage and inter-stage. They go under the labels of content, document, and records management systems. The information lifecycle functionality may be built into an industry solution such as case management, finance manager, or enterprise resource planning.

Sophisticated storage management systems that integrate lifecycle knowledge are available to augment these tools. These storage management solutions range from hierarchical storage managers to those that can identify duplicates and execute retention plans automatically.

As you examine your document-centric processes, applying the model of information lifecycle will help you to understand and explain what happens.

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