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Submission No.14.....

The Secretary
Standing Committee on Science and innovation
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA A.C.T. 2600

Commercialising Local Innovations – the Barriers and Hurdles

Summary:

One of the major hurdles facing this Australian company is that the Australian Governments do not purchase products in line with their announced policies re landfill and the environment. This submission proposes a simple solution.

The situation:

Albox is a relatively successful small company that has developed and patented products, predominantly for records management, that have global marketing potential. Although some success has been achieved and some exports made the potential has been stalled by the lack of acceptance of the innovations in our own Australian market.

Although the Albox products conform to the highest environmental standards and the Australian Government's policies on landfill reduction it is the Australian Governments themselves that are our greatest barrier and hurdle. The Governments in Australia represent a very large proportion of the total market for the consumption of records management products including filing, storage and archiving.

There is ample evidence from the sales that have been made to some Government Agencies and the market research that has been done that the Albox products are superior to the available alternatives.

The marketing "barriers and hurdles" have been identified.

1. Records management products are "commodity" products. They are mainly supplied via major distributors such as OfficeWorks, Corporate Express and Boise Cascade. These distributors have many contracts to supply major customers including Government Agencies. These major distributors source their products from global suppliers and are reluctant to take on new supplier accounts, particularly smaller local innovators.
2. The Government Agencies buy large quantities from this supplier network and although the contractual arrangements may permit purchasing from other sources they are reluctant to deal directly with smaller local innovators.
3. The Senior Records Managers in Government Agencies like our products but re-ordering is done by staff that just keep buying the same products.
4. When we have requested that Government Agencies be directed to purchase certain brands the Purchasing Officers protest that they cannot intervene in the "commercial" process and so appear to favour particular suppliers.

There is an obvious and simple solution to this impasse as it relates to one major product line viz. lever arch files. The Australian Governments use millions of them annually. All lever arch files have metal rings and many have other metal fittings. Metal rings and fittings in binders mean that they end up as land fill. Metal rings and fittings are also not acceptable to archives.

The Albox archfiles have nylon ring mechanisms. The files can be recycled and even shredded if necessary. These archfiles also have styles that stand upright on the shelf; the ring mechanisms do not pinch fingers, rust or misalign. These archfiles are very competitively priced. No trees are cut down and no animal products are used in the production of these Albox archfiles.

The solution:

Australian Governments announce that, in line with their policy to protect the environment by reducing landfill, they will only purchase files that do not have metal rings or other metal components.

The result:

A small Australian company will become much larger very quickly and set an example to the rest of the world for records management practice. Export sales will soon follow.

The following attachments will show that Albox has many other records management products from office to archive. Sales of these products will flow much more rapidly if the hurdle of marketing the files can be overcome. The second attachment illustrates that Albox has developed products in keeping with the latest international technology and environmental standards.

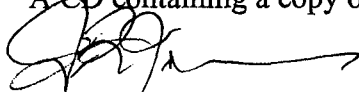
The Australian Governments have the answer to this barrier in their hands. If their purchasing performance is brought into line with their announced principles then at least one Australian innovator will be given huge encouragement and the Australian economy will gain immediate benefits.

Attachments:

1. An Albox brochure describing the "Office to Archive" products.
2. A copy of an article in the Records Management Society of Great Britain – October 2003. A similar article appeared in the Journal of the Australian Registrars Committee December 2004.

Enclosure:

A CD containing a copy of the above and the attachments is enclosed.



Darby Johns
Managing Director

4/04/05

Polypropylene in records management practice:

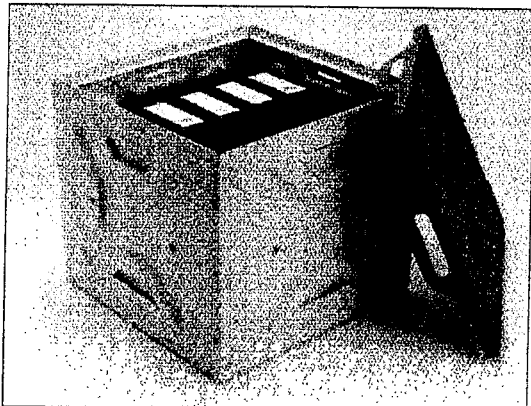
A system for the management and preservation of documentary and photographic records from office to archive

by Darby Johns, Albox UK Ltd

Overview

Technological innovation can come in many different forms of development not just in software, but also in the materials that we use every day in our business as records managers. As a profession, we care about the environment and want to present a responsible attitude towards protecting the planet. We require products that are recyclable at the end of their commercial life. The destruction of trees is no longer acceptable and, although a large amount of paper comes as recycled, many trees are still being destroyed around the globe to fuel our insatiable desire for paper and paperboard. We must look to the technological development of newer materials such as plastics to find the solution. We can now purchase many of the products that we use daily manufactured in polypropylene. Polypropylene is a very environmentally-friendly product (more of that later), and is robust and virtually indestructible.

In this new millennium, there has been a confluence of major changes that affect records management: new materials, a new awareness of the need for the preservation of documents and photographs, a greatly increased awareness of environmental factors, and the emergence of records management as a profession with an adequate training structure to support it. Information technology has arrived, bringing with



Darby Johns

it some great advantages for the dissemination of information, but also some confusion. It has diverted attention from the need to improve the practices of the management of physical records.

Introduction

Despite predictions to the contrary, information technology has increased the volume of paper-based records that need to be filed, accessed and archived. Contemporary social and environmental standards are now much more demanding than in the last millennium, and records managers cannot ignore them.

Technology has delivered new materials that enable significant changes to be introduced to the design and type of the enclosures that can be used in filing and archiving. One of these new materials, polypropylene, has the chemical and mechanical properties that meet the highest archival requirements. It is actually a polymer containing only carbon and hydrogen.

The range of polypropylene products that has been designed and made commercially available is growing, and it is now possible for records to be managed from office to archive without ever having to be re-packaged. These products are not just incremental innovations: they introduce fundamental changes to records management practice.

These changes come, in many cases, with a lower price: a result of using the latest production and distribution logistics. And, because polypropylene is a derivative of oil, no trees are cut down and no animal products are used in the manufacture of these products.

There are problems with records management practice today, and it will take a little time to eradicate them. Records management is only now starting to gain the status and the educational structure that it deserves. Today's records managers are all too often graduates from the last millennium, when they studied much about paper and virtually nothing about plastics. This is understandable given that the early plastics included PVC, which is anathema to archivists, but now there are alternatives that are just right for the job and far superior to paper-based items that they can replace.

The main purpose of this article is to provide a tool for the emerging courses in records management at Universities internationally. It will essentially discuss the enclosures that together comprise the systems that are used for the preservation of records. Without being too scientific or academic, this describes new options that are now available. It may have the side-effect of promoting Albox, but that is inevitable when such products are unique. In time, Albox may well have many competitors producing other polypropylene products for the records management industry, and we will welcome them.

Mainstream records management today is using paperboard folders that cannot be recycled. These files just add to land-fill. Documents are typically removed from files at the time of archiving, repackaged and then placed in cardboard boxes that have a finite life. This is a very time-consuming and costly process. Most filing cabinets, shelving and storage boxes are still based on the outdated foolscap paper sizing. It is time for a change. Polypropylene offers a major step forward, a step that gives the industry a sorely needed alternative at affordable prices.

About polypropylene

Polypropylene, or PP as it is becoming known, is derived from oil. It is a polymer comprised of carbon and hydrogen. It is naturally Ph-neutral and clear. As it contains no food value, it does not attract rodents and it does not support mould growth. It does not rot or decay - i.e. biodegrade - a virtue for records management purposes, as the end products are virtually indestructible. Although it does accept a very small percentage (less than

0.2%) of water, it is water-resistant and its specific density enables it to float on water. It will burn at extreme temperatures - 600 degrees C to ignite - and is thus not highly flammable like paper. When it does burn, it turns into non-toxic water and carbon dioxide.

In some applications, such as archive boxes, it is desirable to add colour to PP. Care must be taken that the pigments added are also suitable for archival purposes. Albox uses titanium dioxide and carbon black to produce white, grey and black colours. Some other pigments contain undesirable heavy metals.

The mechanical properties of PP are also remarkably useful for records management products. When it is heat-creased, the creases are very flexible and extremely durable.

The combination of good chemical and mechanical properties enabled Albox to completely re-engineer the products previously in common use. Instead of just copying and making incremental changes, it was possible to re-look at the end use, and then design completely new storage solutions. This has, in some instances, resulted in fundamental changes to records management practice.

There were some early difficulties in using PP. It is naturally flexible, and it does resist having things attached to it. The flexibility (it does not crack) is actually an advantage in many products. There were attempts to replace rigid products with PP e.g. the cover of lever-arch files, and customers were not impressed. However, the industry has produced new types of covers using the flexible PP, that are much more stable on the shelf than the old-wedge shaped lever arch files.

The fact that PP resists having anything stick to it is an advantage when undesirable accidental spills or handling spoilage are concerned, but a handicap when labels are needed. Developing labels specially designed for PP that are also of archival quality solves this problem.

Other industries including food packaging are now using PP. Records management is far from being a leader in PP usage, but it has compelling reasons for becoming so.

Documentary records

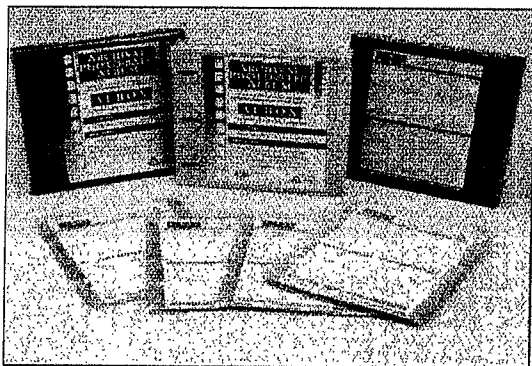
Small files and folders

It was, and unfortunately still is in some countries, the general practice to segregate small files by the use of manila folders (some with metal fasteners), bulldog clips, staples and/or glider clips. Some

attempts have been made to introduce plastic alternatives, but they have not proven to be very popular or efficient. A new, very inexpensive, product has however come onto the marketplace. I had nothing to do with it personally, but I recommend it highly: the ubiquitous PP sheet protector. The first sheet protectors on the market were a disaster, because they were not made from PP. Today most sheet protectors are made from PP, but just double check to be sure.

Using a PP pocket, and that is what a sheet protector is, obviates the need for using metal fasteners, and the pocket holds the contents together better than any folder. The sheet protectors come with a binding edge strip that allows the small files to be kept in ring binders. The typical sheet protector will hold up to 25 pages.

The convenience of sheet protectors was soon recognised by the general market and students, but professional records managers have been slow to adopt them. Records managers should have been the first to see the potential benefits. There was one situation in Australia recently where it appeared that a major archive would have saved



hundreds of thousands of dollars if it had elected to use PP pockets instead of paperboard folders, but they were still locked into traditional paperboard practices - at least that was the only apparent reason.

Larger binders and folders (for files of over 25 pages)

This sector has been dominated for decades by metal ring-binders, including the infamous lever-arch file. Apart from its being unacceptable in archives, users do not generally like them because the rings misalign, the files fall over on the shelf, and they are cumbersome. Incremental innovations in colours and decoration have not changed the basic flaws in design. Attempts to make them more environmentally acceptable by coating the covers in PP failed to solve the basic

problem of the combination of the metal rings in plastic or cardboard covers. Metal is recyclable, but not when it is combined with other materials as in ring-binders.

The one advantage of lever-arch files was that they were cheap. For reasons best known to the global stationery companies, lever-arch files were used as loss-leaders in attempts to maintain or gain market share. Some of the global companies have recently been put up for sale, and lever-arch files may have contributed to this.

Suspension filing

There are two basic options for suspension filing. Either you have individual files that can be removed entirely from cabinets as required, or you have a filing system permanently in the filing cabinet into which you place and from which you retrieve folders. The problems with the first option are that the filed papers are loose, the files get out of order, and the confusion in the cabinet can adversely affect filing efficiency. The advantages of the second option are that the suspension files remain in the designated sequence, and the folders that contain the documents can either bind them or enclose them, as proposed earlier in the section 'Small files and folders'.

All the suspension filing systems that were commercially available, until Albox designed an alternative, were combinations of paperboard, metal and plastic. They were not acid-free, and they were not recyclable. The Albox alternative is due for marketing in 2003. ❖

Darby founded Albox Australia Pty Ltd in 1989, and has been responsible for its product design and development. Albox is now the leading archive supplies company in Australia. Darby has a long career in both marketing, accounting and practical records management in a variety of international companies. Formerly an Australian Government Trade Commissioner in the USA, he has worked in the USA, Hong Kong and Japan, and was granted Freedom of the City of London in 1976. He was the inaugural Chair of the State Records Council of South Australia.

For further information on the Albox range of products, contact Andy Lee at Albox UK Ltd, PO Box 900, Mailsone ME14 4AH. Tel: 01622 739553, or e-mail <andy.lee@archfiles.com>.