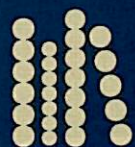


# Two Views on a New View of the World of Web 2.0



## AT A GLANCE

**Title:** *MANAGING THE CROWD: Rethinking Records Management for the Web 2.0 World*

**Author:** Steve Bailey  
**ISBN:** 978-1-85604-641-1  
**Published by:** Facet Publishing, London



» "READ THIS ENGAGING BOOK FOR THE QUESTIONS AND CHALLENGES. BUT UNFORTUNATELY THERE ARE NO ANSWERS" « BARBARA

» "RAISES THE RIGHT ISSUES, ASKS SOME UNCOMFORTABLE QUESTIONS, AND PRODS A FEW SACRED COWS" « STEPHEN

## AN AUSTRALIAN VIEW By Barbara Reed

Steve Bailey is a name to be reckoned with on the UK records management scene. A senior advisor at JISC, InfoNet, his provocative presentations and great questions about the success or otherwise of our professional records practices have made him a frequent guest on conference programmes, and his futurewatch blog continues his thinking.

Bailey's book *Managing the Crowd* is among the first records management texts to look forward to the world of Web 2.0. In Part One he explains the world of Web 2.0, exploring blogs, wikis, social bookmarking and networking, collaborative editing tools and other technologies lumped under this banner.

In Part Two he uses the refracting

lens of Web 2.0 to examine our records management practices. He finds them wanting: not scalable, too concerned with command and control, based too heavily on practices of the implicitly paper past and failing to meet the reality of today's technology, let alone the emerging user centric Web 2.0 world. He finishes in Part Three by providing 10 principles to guide the emergence of Records Management 2.0.

This book is intended to be a polemic, a discussion designed to raise issues, question apparently set-in-stone norms, and to provoke reaction. The personal voice is strong, the style is chatty, providing a good read, presented in short chapters, rather than a weighty scholarly piece. I read its 163 well-spaced pages in a 3-hour single sitting, not only because I was under pressure, but also because it is an engaging read.

So, what is the argument? Beyond the specifics of the technology, Web 2.0 represents a movement away from the somewhat ring-fenced organisational world as we know it to a very different emerging world. In reaction to this world, Bailey proposes that records managers are not even at the table.

He takes a long hard look at a number of records management processes. Classification is one. In a world of Google search, why do we bother? Now, here I take exception to some of the analysis. Actually, as Bailey himself identifies later, classification is not about information retrieval at all, but about context and meaning over time, and the base of a number of our tools such as security and access. So I find the characterisation of metadata schemas and classification as antique ways of managing information retrieval a bit hard to accept.

But, there is some really good stuff about degrees of specificity, who knows the business best, the effects of generalists determining specialist terminology, and responsiveness of our classification tools. Not to mention his terrific point about people being quite happy to tag in the Web 2.0 world but loath to conform to our restricting classification in the organisational context.

And why are we managing records? Bailey critiques the convenient notion that we manage records in records systems. This, he suggests, is another comforting fantasy that we perpetuate, as the line of business systems, increasingly outsourced and living on the Web, take over the storage of business documents.

Why don't we just keep everything? Bailey sets up and then works around this commonly asserted aggressive attack on appraisal and retention. His discussion of appraisal and retention is his longest on records processes. It is not a thorough examination, nor one particularly well cited.

Some of the dynamics of this book's target – records management practice –

might be country specific, but its basis is a reasonably familiar interpretation of the records management standard. The thrust of his arguments are well worth thinking about regardless of individual jurisdictional practice.

Bailey, who entered records management in 1997, looks at it from the perspective of a decade of experience. He bemoans the lack of change in practice during that time, and provides us, through a fictional scenario, with a dystopian picture of a profession clinging to old ways that is increasingly marginalised from where the organisation is moving to. As a child protégé, I have a longer view than this, and can count significant changes in professional practice over a longer time frame. This does not limit the impact of the arguments being made.

Bailey's questions are great and the challenges to practice should be taken on the chin. But unfortunately there are no answers provided in this book. And, Bailey doesn't claim to be providing answers. None the less, the single strategy suggested is that we should look to harness user perspectives and

user-tagging of resources for both classification and interpretations of 'value' as a tool for determining disposal. Let's experiment for sure, but is this it?

Bailey's 10 points for Records Management 2.0 proposed as the final part of the book fail to convince me. They read rather like a wish list – records management as scalable, comprehensive, extensible etc.

So, read this book for the questions and challenges. I loved the intentional iconoclasm. It reminded me a little of the bomb throwing of David Bearman's 1989 *Archival Methods*, which stated that the traditional ways of managing archives were failing their objectives by orders of magnitude (and that was before the electronic tsunami). As it is nearly 20 years since publication of that book, and not that much has changed, we can hope that Bailey's questions and challenges do not suffer the same fate.



## The Reviewer

BARBARA REED, BA (hons), MA (hons), Diploma of Archives Administration, is Director and principal consultant with Recordkeeping Innovation Pty Ltd, Melbourne. She is a former lecturer at Monash University's School of Information Management, and headed the Australian delegation responsible to TC 46 SCII for development of ISO 15489.

## A NEW ZEALAND VIEW by Stephen Clarke

Bailey is quite clear from the outset that this is "a book that provides few answers and seemingly little hope, and that [the hope] only applies to a small subset of the records management profession and the information [i.e. records] it seeks to control," as he says in his Foreword.

We are not left with a feeling that we are setting out on this journey in an optimistic frame of mind, so, what does his thesis offer us in the way of positive outcomes?

Bailey informs us that this is not a records management book but an attempt to challenge the *status quo* and examine a new paradigm; the book should leave us more aware of the meaning and impact of a paradigm shift in which we have to fundamentally rethink records management.

He gives himself a further objective in setting out to provide some specific examples of how records management 2.0 could actually be implemented.

These goals seem a bit more enlightening. We know what the book is not, and what it is setting out to achieve.

The central tenet seems to be that records managers and records management/archival theory is increasingly irrelevant in the digital information environment. The records management community, he says, should leave the management of digital information to IT specialists (or this will be the default position through inadequacy) or to the 'wisdom of the crowd' to decide what should be managed; what has ongoing value and manage only that which survives.

This 'fundamental re-thinking' and 'new paradigm shift' seems eerily

redolent of positions, or philosophical outlooks, discussed by those giants of the paper paradigm; Britain's Sir Hilary Jenkinson's administrator as 'modern destroyer' and US archivist Theodore Schellenberg's creator as sole arbiter on evidential value that, records contain on organisational and functional origins, but with i-pods and palmtops.

Bailey seems to be (perhaps unwittingly) arguing for a continuation of the status quo, where the records creator, or recipient, decides which, or whether, any information survives and take all the ultimate appraisal decisions, or is at best an unwilling advocate of the 'keep everything' approach rather than a 'radical new theoretical model'.

Certainly we are invited to view records management as finding itself in a post 'apocalypse' state of 'fatalistic resignation', with Bailey writing an epitaph for this 'tale of woe'. He sets out his stall and is upfront about being an *agent provocateur* putting up his 'Aunt Sally' to be knocked down by a baying mob of records managers' rebuttals.

He usefully reopens the old wound of 'records' versus 'information' - is there a meaningful distinction to be made, and is it a useful, or even useable, separation of terms? Not in the 'all records are information but not all information constitutes a record' approach, although he cannot resist going down this route, but in terms of 'is this distinction meaningful in the modern office/Web 2.0 world?'

He sees seven distinct types of Web 2.0. Blogs are number one on his list, both as one of the biggest conundrums that records managers face in the office/Web 2.0 world and as a potential records management saviour. The 'wisdom of the crowd' being that people are happy to voluntarily append metadata (blogs,

social tagging, etc.) and contextually describe the information they use, so that this aggregated 'wisdom' will allow us to judge whether information has value and how long it should be retained for.

I fear that Bailey is confusing what I will describe as the '99:1 Ego Theory'. The 1 percent of users who account for most contributions (Wikipedia contributors are only 1 to 2 percent of total site visitors) may exhibit these descriptive behaviors, but ninety percent of users are 'lurkers' who observe, but don't contribute. This over-emphasis on blogs and social bookmarking behaviour is a serious weakness in his argument that the 'wisdom of the crowd' will solve all our records management woes.

It is unlikely that the small proportion of users who actively post their opinions or other self-made material by writing blogs, social tagging, editing wikis, etc, represent a general trend towards users having insatiable desires to manually attribute metadata into corporate information systems. It is certainly not a sustainable alternative to the aggregation of records management theory, however outmoded.

Although Bailey certainly gives us plenty of food for thought, there are, sadly, no answers and no initial promises that they would be forthcoming. However, the book reads well and unsurprisingly has a casual and friendly tone reminiscent of a first person blog entry.

If you are looking for a good exposition of the issues and problems that we as records managers face in the emerging office/Web 2.0 environments then this is a good place to start. If you are looking for answers or critical analysis of the challenges, then you will be disappointed.

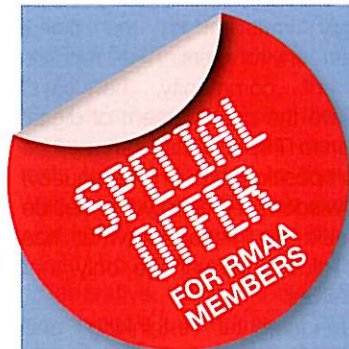
Bailey may not provide us with any

concrete or evaluative conclusions, but he certainly raises the right issues; asks some uncomfortable questions and prods a few sacred cows. Hopefully, his 'Aunt Sally' will tempt a few interested parties to throw some critical analysis and research at this target! **iQ**



The Reviewer

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**MANAGING THE CROWD: Rethinking Records Management in the Web 2.0 World**  
By Steve Bailey, Facet Publishing, 192 pp

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