OFFICE OF THE
INFORMATION & PRIVACY
COMMISSIONER
for British Columbia

Protecting privacy. Promoting transparency.

"The Intersection and Synergies of RIM, Privacy and Information Access"

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Thank you very much. I am delighted to be here – it is an honour to address you this morning.

I hope you are all enjoying this gorgeous city—I enjoyed a cook's tour of the area with a Nanaimo boy yesterday and hope you will all take some time to explore Nanaimo and see the local sites!

It's great to see so many familiar faces—and some new ones as well.

In the audience today is Doug Routley, MLA, Nanaimo–North Cowichan and opposition critic for access and privacy.

Please join me in welcoming him.

Being here in this room today feels a lot like coming home!

As Sheila mentioned, my professional roots are in information management.

I was a member of the first graduating class in archival and information studies at the University of British Columbia in the early 1980s.

At that time, becoming an archivist was not a conventional career choice.

Archival science was an emerging profession in North America, and in its infancy as an academic study.

But it was an exciting time.

There was money, academic and public interest in the field.

I am so glad I made the decision to follow my passion—to work with documents, manuscripts and records—to have a hand in determining how future generations will learn about our society through preserving our documentary legacy.

It has led me on a fascinating and rich career path.

Over the past thirty years, I've worked as an archivist, an information manager and an access to information coordinator.

In the 1990s, I started to carve out a place for myself in the burgeoning privacy world— first as a consultant and then as a privacy regulator in Alberta and subsequently in Ottawa.

These two worlds—records and information management, and access and privacy—are seemingly disparate, but quite complimentary.

Many of the ethical and policy issues information managers face are very much at play in access and privacy work.

The proper management of information is a foundational matter for both professions.

And there is no question that without strong information management practices, information rights could not—and would not—exist in the way they do today.

My background in records and information management has stood me in good stead at every step in my career, including my current role as Information and Privacy Commissioner for BC.

This background grounded me in a contextual view of data and information—how it is created, collected, and how it is intended to be used.

Questions of data integrity and the promotion of sound information governance are very much at play in my approach and my priorities for my tenure as Commissioner.

These are the same values and the same principles shared with those of you in this room.

I inherited an office well-known for its wealth of jurisprudence on access to information.

My goal as Commissioner is to continue building on that foundation, while also enhancing our capacity to tackle some of the more contemporary challenges in access and privacy.

For example, we are taking a very deep look at the implications of emerging technologies, like cloud computing, the proliferation of networked systems, and the growing use of mobile and portable devices.

We have conducted proactive and systemic investigations into technologies like smart meters, facial recognition technology and online gaming platforms.

Our office has an important oversight role in the BC government's new data-linking and information sharing authority.

Ministries can now merge personal information about specific individuals into a single database in order to deliver a common or integrated program.

As you can imagine these measures will have some important privacy implications, and so my office has been very active on this file.

We are also the oversight body for the government's new identity information management service, which will pave the way for secure online government services for citizens and enact a new integrated "smart" identity card.

BC is the first Canadian jurisdiction to venture into this very challenging and complex area of ID Management.

We have to get the policy right.

AND we are watching very closely the open information and open data initiatives of the BC Government.

The Data BC portal has published more than 2,500 data sets online. All of it machine readable, and ready for researchers, citizens and information professionals to dig in.

My office will be auditing BC's open government initiative, one year after its official launch.

We will be looking very closely at the type of data and information that's been posted online, and whether personal information is being protected in this process.

These are but a handful of the issues my office is grappling with. But what they all have in common…is that they are all about opening up data sets , and putting more information online in the name of transparency and accountability.

This is a significant and pressing trend that records and information managers cannot afford to ignore.

In fact, I would argue that as a profession, information professionals have much to offer on these topics generally—and the open data movement specifically.

No profession is better positioned to provide the leadership, expertise and support this movement needs to thrive.

This will be the focus of my remarks today.

But first, a bit of background…

There is no question that the open information and open data movement is fundamentally changing the landscape.

We have new advocates and new voices at the access to information table, new channels for the dissemination of information, accelerated expectations for instant information and a call for data in the raw!

Citizens are clear on what their expectations are.

They want one-stop shopping through centralized portals, information and data available in standardized open formats, and they want policies and rules to allow more information to be available by default.

As citizens dig into this data, more agencies are willing to share it.

The result is a significant culture shift in how we think about, and interact with, information and data.

The governments of the United States, United Kingdom, France, Australia and New Zealand have each launched ambitious open data programs.

The European Commission is talking about a European-wide mega-portal for all of its data.

I welcome the movement for open information and open data. I passionately believe in access to information by citizens, and the fundamental right to know.

The value of transparency and accountability cannot be overstated.

There are also tangible benefits to opening up access this data.

The public sector has rich stores of data that could be the key to discovering new relationships, new variables and new solutions for the pressing social and economic issues facing BC today.

Not overnight, of course… but over time, important and valuable discoveries can and will be made.

The open government movement is still in its infancy.

I predict it will take 3 to 5 years, for governments to become more comfortable with this policy shift, and as more information and data sets are released, citizens will begin to dig into the data and demand it as a matter of course.

But today open data portals are being populated with thousands of data-sets from numerous levels of government – municipal, regional, provincial, and federal, not to mention crown corporations and increasingly the private sector.

As open data proliferates, and more agencies push information into the open data pipeline, there is the potential for duplication, redundancy and overlap.
As programs and policies multiply, shift and change – the integrity and usefulness of the data contained in the open portals could be called into question.

Without management of this data….you have the real potential for an open data mess, where nobody can find, access, or interpret the data online because of the detritus and dead wood that's left floating out there!!!

If open information and open data is to be a successful and lasting movement, we need professional leadership, but also to connect open information and data to citizens and our communities.

The people to lead that movement……are in this room.

Librarians, archivists and information managers are well placed to be the critical voices and leaders of the open government movement – to be the curators of open data, and to professionalize open data by setting standards and promoting best practices, data integrity and data preservation.

In the past, libraries, archives and records offices have been seen as distinct entities.

Today, although the brick and mortar institutions may remain, the professionals are increasingly being drawn together … converging … because most information is now, or will be, in electronic format.

Your skills and expertise are needed, as we think about how we address some of the major challenges, including:

- How we classify the data. We need data standardization and perhaps a taxonomy for the online presentation of data.

- How we put controls on data, on what information is published on line—whether it is useful, current and up to date.

(*You know, I was talking to someone from Nanaimo last night and they told me about the harbour DEBRIS PATROL – that clears the flotsam and jetsam that poses a danger to float planes and boats – We're going to need DEBRIS PATROL for open data!*)

- We are going to have to figure out how to archive and preserve this data, so that we can keep track of where we have been and where we are going.

- We need a movement to preserve the wealth of source data sets. But is there a need to capture the online data portals?

- What about wikis and other information-rich sites citizens rely on for information. Tough stuff here—we know there is little management of information published on the web.

- And of course—how we anonymize the data—to ensure that the data that is coming online is not putting the personal privacy of individuals at undue risk.

Other issues such as web-accessibility standards for data, data security, and intellectual property rights are not, strictly speaking, IM issues, but they illustrate the convergence of various disciplines on these questions.

We will need a village to raise this child!!

You are also an important link to the users of open data.

Governments will continue to funnel data sets into the stream.

Government agencies and private companies, researchers, and analysts will continue to access and manipulate the data coming online.

But who will get the community involved, who will help the individual citizen…and data consumers understand and harness the power of open data?

As information managers, your work, at its core, is to connect people to the information they need.

As archivists and librarians, you share your knowledge and experience, in order to show others how to harness the power of the information.

As we progress into the brave world of open data, you will need to be data literate to help your clients—the public, or your internal users.

You will have a role in making external data sets useful for your organizations!

There is tremendous potential for information professionals to provide for the data literacy individuals and organizations will need to be equal players and benefactors of the wealth of data that will be coming online.

As Information and Privacy Commissioner I am very interested in promoting data leadership as well as data literacy for the public.

On September 21, 2012, my office will be hosting an open data summit, in partnership with the BC Libraries Cooperative and the Ministry of Education.

This one-day conference will promote open data literacy and inspire librarians, archivists and other information managers to take a leading role in the open government.

It will be a hands-on, practically oriented workshop format with a range of speakers and activities to engage both novices (Open Data 101) and experienced practitioners (best practices and the future of open data).

I encourage you to consider attending, to learn about open data, to talk about the future of open data, how we can cultivate it, but also how we professionalize it.

Information about the conference is available on our website. Check it out and please forgive my infomercial.

And, if there are any of you in this room wondering what the incentive is to get involved in the open government movement, here are just a few ideas of what's in it for you.

First, this is a new frontier that is ripe to be moulded and shaped. If there was ever an opportunity to play a role in some cool, leading edge digital data stuff… this is it.

You can demonstrate the clear value your skills and knowledge have in an increasingly digital world.

Getting involved in open information, and data literacy, will draw attention to the resources your organization has at its disposal.

The open data movement is a tremendous opportunity to raise the bar and have a significant impact on how this movement unfolds.

I encourage each of you to connect to the world of open data: You can get the conversation going, raise awareness within your organization.

Tap into your community of knowledge and the experts and leaders in this room.

And finally, collaborate: work together as information professionals to make it happen.

This is not an IT gig—there are many others that need to be in this tent: program leaders, users, statisticians, legal experts, data security and privacy professionals. As I said earlier, it will take a village to raise this child.

Thank you for your attention this morning.

I have kept my address short to leave some time for questions.