

BANCA D'ITALIA

*Ufficio Ricerche Storiche
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Computerization has long since revolutionized archival work methods.

Since 1989 the Bank of Italy's current correspondence has been handled with a classification system based on a computerized protocol and filing plan, and e-mail for internal communications. So far, however, documents have always remained on paper, even outgoing letters, which although drafted electronically are always printed and kept in their file folders. At present, therefore, the Bank has a mixed electronic and paper-based system. That is, we have computerized record management but largely traditional archives.

The computerization of the classification criteria and linkage with the records schedule, which determines how long each series of documents must be retained, has facilitated the management of semi-current records and the appraisal of documents, thus creating the conditions for rational transfer to the archives.

Considering how many years it has been since the introduction of information technology, the first substantial lots of electronically stored documents will begin to reach the Bank of Italy's historical archives sometime in the next decade.

In some cases, however, the historical archives have already had to face the problem of acquiring computerized documentation that was not identifiable because the obsolete hardware and software required were no longer available within the Bank, while the corresponding paper print-outs could not be located. This has resulted in provisions for more careful conservation of the paper copies of important material.

At present the historical archives, which in any case will be handling primarily paper documents for many years to come, are taking steps to ensure that we will not be caught unprepared for the emerging situation.

On the theoretical plane the archives are gathering information and appraising experiences, with participation in the international discussion promoted by the *Inter Pares* working group formed at government initiative to study the nature, techniques of storage and problems of electronic documents.

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On the practical plane, for some time now the historical archives have been using modern information technology for the management and cataloguing of their holdings. For twelve years we have been building a database with analytical descriptions of the file folders, and for four years optical disks have been used for reproducing and consulting the individual documents. The archives have thus developed the know-how and the IT instruments that will enable us to take in the next generation of documentary materials without any special problems.