



Tech tip – Using Microsoft Word's Version Control Feature

One of the more difficult management system compliance issues is that of document control. In fact, most companies fail audits due to poor document control issues. Those charged with the responsibility of controlling an organization's documents continually struggle with what to control, what historical revisions records should be kept, how should they be kept, and where should they be kept. Should revision information be kept in an external file or appended to the document itself? If revision history is retained externally, this adds another document to your system. If retained on the document itself, the revision information may take up more space than the body of the document! What about keeping revision information within the document itself, visible only when required? Ah, questions, questions, questions. What we need are answers!

Well, a program most of us have on our PC's and one that many of us have used to create our documentation is Microsoft Word. Though it might not solve all of our document control problems, it does contain features that can reduce tedious administration and improve the manageability of a company's documentation.

One of these features is the capability to maintain a version history. By choosing **File -> Versions**, we get a list of all the versions of the document that have been saved including the date and time, who saved it (automatically picked from the **Tools -> Options -> User Information** dialog box within Word) and any comments the user

entered. If version control was previously active for this document, a list of these revisions would appear in the "Existing Versions" dialog box. To enter comments regarding the version we have just edited select **File -> Versions -> Save Now...** and a dialog box prompting you for your comments will appear.

One of the benefits of the "Save Version" feature is that by clicking on any of the versions in the list you can open the document up as it originally appeared. This provides a complete history of the document. So, if the person who last saved document entered in some cryptic explanation and has since left the company owing to a 6/49 windfall, you can quickly open up the latest version and its preceding version to compare the differences between documents. You will also never have that confused look on your face when your auditor

confronts you with a discrepancy between a document's revision date and the date shown on its corresponding revision list.

One drawback (or benefit, depending on how you look at it) is that unless the user explicitly selects **File -> Versions -> Save Now...** no prompt for version information will occur and hence, no comments on the version can be entered. (Unless you selected "Automatically save a version on close", in which case any time the document is edited and saved the Comments will read "Automatic Version".)

Maybe it would be a good idea to prompt for version information as the default? I'll cover how we can do this in next month's article.

**Submitted by Mark Silvester,
B.B.A., C.Q.E.
Email: mark@ockham.ca
Website: www.ockham.ca**

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