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Accessing Canadian federal information: a depository program for the twenty-first century?

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1. Introduction

Robert Hewison once remarked that the turn of a century raises expectations, but that the end of a millennium promises apocalypse as well as revelation [1]. It seems appropriate six months not only from the end of the decade and the century, but the millennium, that we look both backward to the past and forward to the future. Two years into the new millennium, Canada's Depository Services Program (DSP) will celebrate its 75th anniversary. Three quarters of century of service and existence is no small feat. The life cycles of government programs are generally measured in days and years rather than decades and centuries. The Depository Services Program (DSP) is probably one of the Canadian government's oldest programs. It makes some sense then to stop, and take stock of where it stands now that it is on the verge of the millennium.

The last two decades have dramatically altered the environment in which the Depository Services Program operates. The old familiar and comfortable paradigms on which it was based have disappeared. In their place, the DSP confronts both conceptual challenges and opportunities. The fact of the matter may be that the time has come to consider whether Canada's Depository Services Program is moving into the autumn of its existence. This question needs to be faced not only because others are asking it, but also because its time has come [2]. The inescapable reality for the DSP is that the changing face of government information and service delivery may well be issuing a final curtain call. Government funding remains scarce. Faced with conflicting demands, government may well feel that the DSP is no longer required, especially now that we are swiftly moving toward the first true

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