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From the Technology Trenches – Rick Bernauer, Senior Systems Consultant

Metadata is a hot topic. What is it? If you use Microsoft Word, Excel or PowerPoint (and yes even WordPerfect) you can see some of the metadata easily. Open the document for editing and then select FILE | PROPERTIES to view information like the author's name and company, the number of words in the document and even the amount of time spent editing the document. While this may not seem like highly confidential information – it could be if an attorney is re-using a contract originally drafted by another firm and no one knew to remove that information from the document before they sent it to a client for review.

At its worst, Metadata can include history about the editing of a document including the actual changes that were made. Say a settlement offer where the opposing party could see that you changed the amount from \$250K to \$200K.

Why is this information saved with the document? Basically to enable collaboration. Microsoft, in particular, has built many features into their software to make it easier to share information and collaborate. Unfortunately, these same features lead to problems when sharing documents with parties outside your firm.

What can I do to protect myself? First, be aware of the problem and make sure everyone in your firm is educated. I recommend not sharing Word documents at all – save to PDF format. If you must exchange Word documents check out these sites:

[www.payneconsulting.com](http://www.payneconsulting.com) - Metadata Assistant, a tool to view/remove.

[www.esqinc.com](http://www.esqinc.com) - iScrub, another tool with a free viewer download.

[www.microsoft.com/downloads](http://www.microsoft.com/downloads) - Search for "rhdttool.exe" Microsoft's tool only works with Word 2003 – but there's a good white paper for you to read.

This month's Tech Tip – Excel: To enter the current time in a cell, select a cell and press Ctrl+Shift+;

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