Understanding File Timestamps

Description

The terms, â??file timestampsâ?? and â??file metadataâ?? are often used interchangeably, however, they can have two completely different meanings. I trust the following will help clarify the differences.

1) There are two separate â??timestampsâ?? for office documents and several other file types. The first set, is stored in the operating system (Windows, Linux, MacOS) and are different from those stored in the file.

2) The metadata stored in a file (Date Created, Date Last Saved etc.) may also be referred to as the files timestamps and confused with whatâ??s stored by the operating system.

3) The two sets of dates are often very different because the operating system timestamps are easily altered through copying files and automated software processes (virus scanners, indexing). The timestamps in the file metadata are altered when files are saved or edited by the native application.

For example, if a custodian copies a file from their system to a network folder the created and last accessed times displayed in Microsoft Windows would be changed to the date and time of the copy. However, if you view the internal metadata (Date Created, Date Last Saved) in the document properties these values would remain unaltered. If you are looking for the most reliable created or last saved time for a document make sure you use the internal file metadata timestamps.

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