

Outsourcing specific tasks or services is by no means a new phenomenon. Libraries and archives have contracted out some of their operations for decades. This is an area in which lessons learned from outsourcing in other media can be of value. For example, preservation microfilming has frequently been outsourced and valuable (and sometimes painful) experience has been gained as a result. A major learning experience from preservation microfilming which is directly applicable to the digital environment is the critical importance of having sufficient knowledge of the technology to be able to prepare effective specifications. Earlier microfilming tended to be of poor quality, reinforcing user resistance to it. In recent years, the increased practical experience of the preservation microfilming community has led to the adoption of appropriate standards developed in partnership between the preservation community and the micrographics industry, as well as greatly improved contracts with bureaux. These developments have yielded major benefits for the preservation of the original materials, for users of microfilmed material, and for the cost-effective deployment of scarce preservation resources. The lessons from preservation microfilming were often learned through a process of trial and error but can now serve as an effective reminder to transfer them to the digital environment.

Cost will clearly be a key consideration when deciding whether or not to contract out digital preservation but there are also other factors to consider and the advantages and disadvantages of each will need to be balanced against the overall mission of the institution. For example, legal provisions due to privacy or confidentiality may influence whether outsourcing is appropriate or not. It should also be emphasised that the extent to which the potential advantages of using third party services can be maximised and the potential disadvantages minimised will be heavily dependent on dedicating staff resources to the following:

- Establishing clear and realistic requirements;
- Maintaining good communication between the contractor and the institution;
- Undertaking quality assurance checks;
- Developing and monitoring the contract.

These costs will need to be added to the overall contract costs when calculating the cost benefit of using third party services for digital preservation, bearing in mind that most of these costs will be or should be incurred even if preservation is not outsourced.

Figure 2

Issues and Potential Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Third Party Services in Digital Preservation Activities

Issue	Potential advantage of using 3rd party service	Potential disadvantage of using 3rd party service
Limited practical experience in preserving complex digital objects over time		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Avoids the need to develop costly infrastructure (particularly important for small institutions)- Allows the institution to focus on other aspects of service provision- Provides specialist skills and experience which may not be available within the institution- If there are economies of scale, outsourcing may well be cost effective- Allows action to be taken in the short to medium term, pending development of infrastructure		
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Without some practical experience and expertise, it will be difficult to develop and monitor effective- Without practical experience it will also be difficult effectively to communicate the requirements of t- Danger of either not developing or losing skills base- There is no established bench marking. It is still too new an area- Risk of business failure- Until the market increases there may be an over-dependence on one contractor- Unless there are adequate exit strategies, may be locked into an outsourcing contract longer than
Access considerations		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Monitoring usage may be more efficient (assuming the contractor has a demonstrated ability to de- There may be synergies and cost savings in outsourcing access and preservation together		
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Difficult to control response times which may be unacceptably low and/or more costly, especially fo
Rights Management		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Avoids what is often a resource intensive activity for the institution		
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- May significantly increase the cost of the contract and/or complicate negotiations with rights holder
Security		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Contract can guarantee security arrangements required by the institution		
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Lack of control, especially for sensitive material
Quality control		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- A watertight contract will build in stringent quality control requirements		

- Risk of loss or distortion may still be unacceptably high for highly significant and/or sensitive mater

[See Exemplars and Further Reading](#)