





The National Archives

Things we wish we'd known.....

AKA DP Confessional

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If only we'd known..... (Outline)

- Organisational fitness really, really matters
- Tackling file format obsolescence is not always the main issue
- How digitisation relates and is often confused for DP
- The money would run out by now
- We knew more than we thought we did

Organisational fitness

- Becoming primarily *or even partly* an organisation that receives, maintains, disseminates according to digital processes will mean massive change
- Affecting everyone in the organisation
- A strategic issue
- Particular issues for memory organisations distilled by MLA-funded project “Principles supporting long-term access to digital material”
- Time of massive change in funding, business models, opportunities

Format obsolescence not always the main issue

- Preserving text and image is relatively straightforward: people have been doing it for a long time
- *Ditto* simpler types of dataset archiving
- Basic issues of replication and information assurance and security are often more urgent than file format obsolescence, as are strategic and management issues

Digitisation relationship and common confusion

- Organisations get themselves in knots with this
- Be clear which / when you are talking about, distinguishing in language

Q7. We digitise records in our care - isn't this a type of digital preservation?

A. This old usage of the term 'digital preservation' is more accurately about the contribution digital surrogates make to the preservation of paper (or analogue) records. Owing to widespread confusion, we do not recommend this usage of the term.

Digitisation projects create new digital assets that will need preserving, unless you can afford the cost and manual handling of re-digitisation. It is correct to refer to the preservation of these as digital preservation, but the term also means the processes of maintaining access to born-digital records, discussed elsewhere in this FAQ.

Digitisation relationship [2]

Digitisation

- Converting physical information resources, where the message and the medium are bound physically together, into digital code that can ^{*Only*} be displayed or otherwise processed by a computer

Digital preservation

- Ensuring meaningful access to digital information over long periods of time, typically including generations of hardware and software technology

Money would run out by now

- Or “*digital preservation sounds so expensive and you want me to tackle itNOW ?!?!?*”
- You probably can't afford not to do it to protect investment and your ability to carry on business operations
- There is still some money around for the brave and the clever: EU, HLF, Mellon, JISC
- Tough funding climate necessitates clear focus on service development
- Influence the outcome rather than being a victim of it

We knew more than we thought we did.....

- See previous slides!: it's not *all* rocket science
- Some of the most important things are things we've known how to do for a long time
- Some of these things need changing, adapting
- Some now need doing properly as 'custom and practice' have replaced good practice
- Some of our existing infrastructure can be redeployed
- Tools have been developed to begin to tackle active preservation, many are available free
- There is a less scary range of issues at the bleeding edge
- (Apologies)

References

- DP FAQ & parsimonious preservation:
<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/information-management/projects-and-work/digital-preservation-faqs.htm>
- Archives for 21st Century:
<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/information-management/policies/archives-century.htm>
- Digital continuity guidance and procurement framework:
<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/information-management/projects-and-work/digital-continuity.htm>
- MLA-sponsored principles:
http://www.mla.gov.uk/what/programmes/digital/Supporting_Long_Term_Access_to_Digital_Material
- Chris Rusbridge on Digital Preservation fallacies (incl obsolesc):
<http://www.ariadne.ac.uk/issue46/rusbridge/>

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QUESTIONS?