

Archives for the 21st Century: Consultation Draft

A response from the Digital Preservation Coalition

Introduction

1. The **Digital Preservation Coalition (DPC)** is a not-for profit membership organisation whose primary objective is to raise awareness of the importance of the preservation of digital material and the attendant strategic, cultural and technological issues. Its vision is to make **our digital memory accessible tomorrow.**
2. The Digital Preservation Coalition welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Archives for the 21st Century Consultation Draft. We seek opportunities to work more closely with the consultation team in refining and delivering the strategy that the report delineates.
3. In particular we support the recommendation for a co-ordinated response to 'the growing challenge of managing digital information' with a responsive and strengthened workforce supported by strengthened leadership

The threats to digital data

4. We note and wish to underline the significant risks which accrue when digital resources are not properly managed. These risks include immediate legal, financial, regulatory and reputational risks, such as the 15 million dollar damages suffered by Morgan Stanley in 2006 for failing to preserve and manage email (Taub 2006).
5. We note the less immediate but sustained risk to organisational memory and cultural heritage triggered by poor management of digital resources. We share the view of UNESCO (2003) that digital resource can have 'lasting value and significance, and therefore constitute a heritage that should be protected and preserved for current and future generations.'
6. We note the opportunity cost associated with the loss of digital data: such as loss of data associated with the 1975 NASA Viking Lander projects. Tapes containing primary data from these missions was found to be cracked and unusable in the late 1990's and researchers were forced to re-assemble and re-code the data from print outs (Cosgrove-Mather 2003)

The opportunity: solutions that are to hand

7. It is our contention that the UK already has a significant level of expertise in the field of digital preservation. Although sometimes daunting, **the challenge of managing digital information is one that the UK is well placed to address.**
8. The Digital Preservation Coalition is a cross-sectoral organisation with a distinctive capacity to explore, develop and deliver co-ordinated approaches to the management of the UK's digital cultural legacy. **We offer our support** in delivering this element of the report's recommendations.

9. There is a greater value and faster progress can be achieved through collaboration with organisations such as represented by the DPC's members. We note the success and expertise of the DPC's members in addressing the long term management and access to digital data. This has been based on:
- *empirical analysis of needs* (such as the Mind the Gap Report);
 - *definition of standards* (such as DRAMBORA from the DCC and 'Trusted Digital Repository' from RLG)
 - *development of frameworks to assess and plan for specific challenges* (such as LIFE from the British Library or the Inspect project from CeRCH);
 - *refinement of standards for specific contexts* (such as Shaman from CDLR at Strathclyde University or
 - *development and sharing of tools and services* (such as Pronom and DROID from the National Archives or the preservation hosting facility offered by UKDA)
 - *deployment of standards-based solutions across national institutions* (such as the Digital Media Initiative at the BBC or the Trusted Digital Repository from the National Library of Scotland
 - *offering of advice and training* (such as the Digital Preservation Training Programme from ULCC and the DPC's technology watch reports)
 - *recognition of long term value of digital data within policy and governance* (such as RCUK's data management and access working party or English Heritage's insistence on digital archives from archaeology)
 - *recognising the value of intellectual property to the economy* (for example, 95 of the publishers registered with the Publishers Licensing Society use third party preservation service providers (Portico or LOCKSS) to help preserve electronic publications in the long term)

These are just a few examples of the work of DPC members.

Partnership

10. We note that the report calls for 'innovative cross-sectoral partnerships' for investment. We believe that DPC members, with their wide and deep expertise, are well placed to deliver elements of this programme in partnership with existing archival and cultural institutions. This latent 'capacity to improve' will enhance the experience of the archive users.

Access

11. We note and welcome the drive for comprehensive access to archival holdings through online delivery to citizens at times and places that suit them, and we welcome the renewed focus on cultural and learning partnerships. We note the investment that this may require in the creation of new content, and in the annotation of existing content. This compounds the need for more effective consideration of long term management of digital assets.

12. We note that digital preservation can appear as a niche or specialized concern. It is our contention however that there is **no access without preservation**, and that the inherent value of digital resources can most effectively be exploited in the long term. Consequently, digital preservation is a concern for all. It is a necessary component for access and a prerequisite of effective exploitation.

References

Cosgrove-Mather, B 2003, Coming Soon: a Digital Dark Age? In CBSNews Tech., online at: <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/01/21/tech/main537308.shtml> last access 04/08/09

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