

Report reveals major gaps in long term management of valuable digital assets

15th February 2006

A 'state of the nation' report today reveals that less than 20% of UK organisations surveyed have a strategy in place to deal with the risk of loss or degradation to their digital resources - despite a very high level of awareness of the risks and potential economic penalties.

With the release today of the report, *Mind the gap: assessing digital preservation needs in the UK*, the Digital Preservation Coalition (DPC) aims to help government, public institutions and private companies turn high awareness into concerted action.

The survey reveals that the loss of digital data is commonplace - it is seen as an inevitable hazard by some - with more than 70% of respondents saying data had been lost in their organisation. Awareness of the potential economic and cultural risks is high, with 87% recognising that corporate memory or key cultural material could be lost and some 60% saying that their organisation could lose out financially. In 52% of the organisations surveyed there was management commitment to digital preservation - but only 18% had a strategy in place. A pdf version of the report is available from <http://www.dpconline.org/docs/reports/uknamindthegap.pdf>

Prior to the survey, a number of high profile cases had helped raise awareness of the risks of digital data loss. In a recent judgement in the US, Morgan Stanley had more than \$1 billion awarded against them as a result of their failure to preserve and hand over some documents required by the courts. The Securities and Exchange Commission in the US are also looking at fining the same bank over \$10 million - specifically for failing to preserve email documents.

The data tapes from the 1975 Viking Lander mission to Mars were recently discovered to have deteriorated despite careful storage, and scientists also found that they could not decode the formats used and had to rely on the original paper printouts.

The BBC's 1986 Domesday project is another example of the unique fragility of digital material. Designed to capture a picture of Britain in 1986, the collection of photographs, maps and statistical information was recorded onto 30cm laserdiscs. But less than 20 years on, the laserdiscs and player are obsolete. The data was only rescued thanks to a surviving laserdisc

player and more than a year's effort by specialist teams.

According to the DPC-commissioned report, the principal risks to digital material are: the deterioration of the storage medium; obsolescence of hardware, software or storage format; and failure to save crucial document format information (a common example is preserving tables of numbers without preserving an explanation of their meaning).

The report identifies 18 core needs, each of which has recommendations which will address them. Recommendations are addressed to organisations, government, and funding bodies. Among the key needs: awareness of digital preservation issues needs to be more commonplace - particularly amongst data creators; organisations need to take stock of their digital materials (55% of the respondents to the survey do not know what digital material they hold); and projects need to be funded from the outset with the long-term value of the information produced and the cost of retention taken into account. There needs to be funding for more digital archives

This UK Digital Preservation Needs Assessment study, carried out by the software services company Tessella, looked at digital preservation practice in government bodies, archives, museums, libraries, education, scientific research organisations, pharmaceutical, environmental, nuclear, engineering, publishing and financial institutions

"Gone are the days when archives were dusty places that could be forgotten until they were needed" said Lynne Brindley, Chair of the Digital Preservation Coalition. "The digital revolution means all of us - organisations and individuals - must regularly review and update resources to ensure they remain accessible. Updating need not be expensive, but the report is a wake-up call to each one of us to ensure proper and continuing attention to our digital records."

Dr Peter Townsend, Commercial Director of Tessella said: "It is critically important that organisations create long-term pro-active information management plans, and allocate adequate budget and resource to implementing practical solutions." Dr Robert Sharpe of Tessella added: "Organisations that create large volumes of digital information need to recognise the benefits of retaining long-term information in digital form so that these can be balanced against the costs of active preservation."

Notes for Editors:

About the DPC: The DPC is a cross-sectoral membership organisation dedicated to securing the preservation of digital resources in the UK. It currently has [28 members and associate members](#)

: The British Library, the Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries (MLA), the Consortium of Research Libraries in the British Isles (CURL), the Digital Curation Centre (DCC), Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC), the National Archives, the National Archives of Scotland; the National Library of Scotland, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI); the University of Oxford, University of London Computer Centre (ULCC), Arts and Humanities Data Service (AHDS), the BBC Information & Archives, the Centre for Digital Library Research at Strathclyde (CDLR); the Corporation of London, Council for the Central Laboratory of the Research Councils (CCLRC) , the Ministry of Defence, National Electronic Library for Health, National Library of Wales, Natural History Museum, Online Computer and Library Center (OCLC), Open University, Publishers' Association, Research Libraries Group (RLG), Trinity College Library Dublin, the University of Southampton, UK Data Archive, and the Wellcome Library.

Previous DPC research: A [DPC Members survey](#) , which was undertaken in 2003, revealed details of volumes and formats of digital materials held by DPC members and the issue they faced in their preservation. Additional work was undertaken to provide real-life scenarios of circumstances in which digital materials become vulnerable to loss. In 2005, the Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries, funded a sample survey of local and regional organisations in two regions. The report, *Mind the gap:*

assessing digital preservation needs in the UK

is the culmination of the two earlier surveys, and a more detailed, wider survey undertaken in 2005

About Tessella: Tessella Support Services plc specialises in the application of innovative software solutions to scientific, technical and engineering problems. Tessella has over 20 years of proven expertise in the area of reliable and authentic long-term preservation of electronic records, both for government and scientific organizations. In recent years a number of mainly academic and government organisations have been at the cutting-edge of facing up to the digital preservation challenge, and Tessella has played a key role in a number of the most practical of these initiatives.

Further information:

For DPC press enquiries and interviews please contact Anna Arthur, 0207 637 2994, anna@arthurleone.com

www.dpconline.org

For Tessella press enquiries and interviews please contact Alison Smith, Marketing Manager, + 44 (0) 01235 546609, alison.smith@tessella.com

www.tessella.com