DigitalPreservationCoalition

THE GLOBAL BIT LIST OF ENDANGERED MATERIALS



Annual Statement

November 2026

The Global *Bit List* of Endangered Digital Materials reports the threats to digital materials and the impact of efforts to reduce those threats. It is a record of risk and a call to action. It draws on the expertise of a global community that understands both the fragility of digital resources and the practical steps required to secure them. And it offers an impartial assessment of emerging challenges as well as a clear invitation to act.

This year's World Digital Preservation Day theme, *Save Our Stories: Our Heritage in Danger*, reminds us of what is ultimately at stake. Associated with every piece of digital content are stories that help societies understand their past, navigate their present and shape their future. When digital materials are lost, corrupted, manipulated or rendered inaccessible, it is not only information that disappears. We risk losing evidence, identity, memory, culture and the lived experiences of communities around the world. We lose the opportunity to share these with future generations.

The context in which we find ourselves since the last publication of the *Bit List* is no simpler. Since November 2025, institutions around the world have faced mounting pressures arising from economic uncertainty, geopolitical instability, rapid technological change, cyber-attacks and environmental disruption, as well as shifting legal and regulatory landscapes. These developments affect our ability to preserve digital materials, but they also affect the digital materials themselves.

Armed conflict and geopolitical instability continue to reshape societies and institutions. Digital resources have become both a record of events and targets within them. War continues to pose a direct threat to digital heritage, whether through the deliberate destruction of records, attacks on critical infrastructure, the displacement of cultural institutions or the loss of the expertise and resources needed to sustain long-term preservation activities. Data centres have become targets of warfare, cyber and otherwise. Records of government, cultural expression, protest, science and everyday life are increasingly vulnerable to deletion, manipulation, displacement or destruction. At the same time, the infrastructures upon which we depend for access are themselves exposed to disruption. While digital preservation has been more than a question of technological longevity for some time, it is increasingly bound up with resilience, trust, accountability and human security.

Meanwhile, the pace of technological change continues to astonish. Artificial intelligence, automation and large-scale data processing have created remarkable new opportunities for access, discovery and innovation. Yet they have also introduced significant new preservation challenges. The authenticity and integrity of digital materials become ever more important as tools for manipulation of misrepresentation become ever more accessible. Large language models hungry for content have jammed content platforms as never before. A growing response has been the deployment of barriers to automated access. While aimed at restricting AI crawlers and large-scale content scraping, these measures increasingly affect legitimate web archiving activities, making the preservation of the public web much harder. The tension between protecting content from exploitation and preserving it as part of the historical record has emerged as an important and rapidly developing challenge during the past year. At the same time, dependence on complex commercial platforms and services continues to grow, increasing the risks associated with vendor change, product withdrawal, and technical obsolescence. Massive flows of capital have inflated the technology market but also created economic instability that may prove hard to escape.

Yet these technologies also offer significant opportunities for digital preservation. Across our community, practitioners are exploring how new approaches can support preservation activities at a scale and speed that would previously have been difficult to achieve. Early experiences are being

shared, helping to build collective understanding of both the possibilities and limitations of these tools. As with many technological advances, the challenge is not whether they should be adopted, but how they can be used responsibly, transparently and sustainably in support of long-term access to digital materials.

The economic environment presents further challenges. Many organizations responsible for preserving digital materials are being asked to do more with fewer resources. Short-term financial pressures can encourage decisions that appear efficient today, but which transfer risk into the future. The resulting technical debts are often hidden until a system fails, a service closes, expertise is lost or a vital record can no longer be accessed. The *Bit List* reminds us that digital preservation is not an optional enhancement to the digital age, it is a condition of its success.

The climate crisis also continues to shape the preservation landscape. Extreme weather events, disruptions to energy supply and growing concerns about environmental sustainability all have implications for digital infrastructure. Data centre construction projects have become contentious in ways that might not have been anticipated a year ago. As organisations seek to balance long-term access, operational resilience and environmental responsibility, the need for thoughtful and sustainable stewardship becomes ever more apparent. This is not simply a technical challenge. It reflects a growing discussion within our community about how we balance preservation ambitions with environmental responsibility, and how we can safeguard the stories that matter most while operating within the limits of the resources available to us.

Yet the *Bit List* should not be read as a message of despair. The digital preservation community continues to demonstrate remarkable ingenuity, collaboration and determination. The 2026 Digital Preservation Awards, celebrated shortly before publication of this report, offered remarkable and continuing evidence of the innovation, commitment, enthusiasm and drive that exists across our field. The finalists showcased not only technical excellence, but also creativity, collaboration, leadership and practical action in the face of increasingly complex challenges. Around the world, practitioners continue to develop new tools, refine standards, share expertise and build partnerships that strengthen our collective resilience. Every improved workflow, every preserved collection, every successful intervention, and every avoided loss demonstrates that the risks identified in the *Bit List* are not inevitable.

The *Bit List* is intended as an advocacy tool in support of these efforts. It provides a shared language for communicating risk, a framework for identifying priorities, and an evidence base for securing the support that digital preservation requires. In a period marked by uncertainty and competing demands, it helps explain why preservation matters and why action cannot be delayed. Its purpose is not simply to describe threats, but to strengthen and amplify the remarkable work already being undertaken across our global community.

Digital materials do not survive by accident. They persist because we choose to act. They require skills, resources, institutions, partnerships and long-term commitment. The lessons of the past year have reinforced what this community has understood for decades: that preserving digital materials is not merely about safeguarding data. It is about protecting evidence, memory, identity, knowledge, and opportunity. In an increasingly uncertain world, safeguarding these stories is not optional. It is essential, from one generation to the next.