DigitalPreservationCoalition

What is Digital Preservation?

Digital Preservation is the series of managed activities necessary to ensure continued access to digital materials for as long as necessary. Digital records are at risk from technology-related issues such as hardware and software *obsolescence* and *bit rot*, but IT solutions, such as reliable digital storage and back-up, are only a part of the bigger picture. Digital Preservation addresses a wide range of organisational and resourcing issues too. These include risk assessment, sustainability planning, skills development and change management. As well as maintaining the original digital files, it is also important to capture information about the file's context and any relevant documentation as these will allow future users to open and understand the files.

Key Term: **Obsolescence**

Technology moves rapidly, new versions of software and hardware are regularly released with no guarantees that it will be compatible with older systems and files. File formats, software packages and storage media can all become obsolete quickly and this is one of the key issues addressed by digital preservation.

Key Term: **Bit Rot**

Bit rot is the gradual decay of storage media where the individual bits (1s and 0s) of digital files 'flip' leading to a corrupted or inaccessible file.

Why do we do Digital Preservation?

We preserve digital records to retain important information about the work carried out by our organisation. This can be motivated by issues such as:

- Legislative and regulatory compliance
- Efficiency and financial gains from information reuse
- Good governance
- Documenting events of historical significance
- Retaining corporate memory

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What can be considered a digital record?

Digital records for preservation can exist as any type of digital file. This can include: text documents, spreadsheets, emails, databases, images, websites, audio, video and social media posts. To qualify as a digital record a file should provide evidence of an event, transaction or decision that needs to be documented.

Can't we just print it out?

Digital material can often only be archived well in digital form: there is no non-digital equivalent that retains all the essential information and functionality. For example, a print out of a spreadsheet loses all annotations and formula, and without this important information future users may not be able to understand the contents. This type of embedded information is also often key to a document's value as evidence .
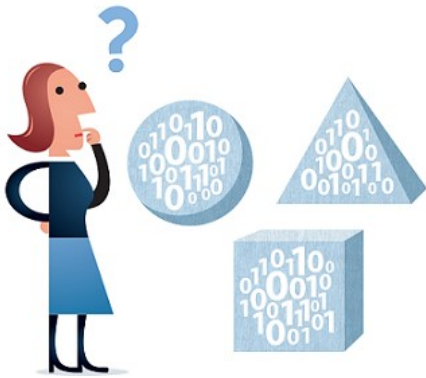
Does everything need to be preserved?

Not all digital files produced need to be retained as archival records. The question is less what can be preserved but more, what should not be lost? Selection and disposal are significant aspects of any digital management activity. Consideration should be given to whether a digital file acts as a record of an important event, transaction or decision and these records should be selected for preservation.

Key Term: **Metadata**

Metadata is information which describes significant aspects of a digital record and is required successfully to interpret, manage, and preserve the records over time. This often includes important contextual, historical, and technical information.

How can I help?

It has been consistently proven that preserving digital material is more successful and easier to do if best practice is followed from the point of creating the file. Simple steps to aiding preservation efforts include: creating files in preservation-friendly formats with consistent file names (see note on File Naming and Formats), making sure files are stored in the appropriate location (see note on Back-up and Storage), understanding which files will be required for preservation as records (see notes on Preserving the Authoritative Record, Preserving Email, Preserving the Web), and that any necessary accompanying *metadata* and documentation is also captured.

For more information on Digital Preservation visit the DPC Website: https://www.dpconline.org