

Flyer 228

Preserving Digital Information Transforming Libraries 5: December 1997

Introduction

THE PROBLEM of preserving digital information and the strategies that are and might be employed to address it are the focus of this fifth issue of *Transforming Libraries*.

In laying out the problem, a number of questions are asked: How will we transmit research results, official evidence, and our cultural heritage to future generations? Supposing we copy new data onto new media, will we have the software needed to make sense of the data? Who will pay for preserving digital information? Who will decide what to preserve, on what media, and with what level of metadata management? Answers to all of these questions will not likely be available for some time although the technical issues may be solved more readily than some of the policy issues.

Twenty-one individuals involved at the technical or policy level in developing strategies for preserving digital information were interviewed for this publication. As reported in the "Issues Roundtable" section there is consensus on a number of points including:

- The problem is growing faster than we are currently working to solve it.
- Often confusing is the difference between digitizing for preservation and digitizing for access, and preserving digital-only information.

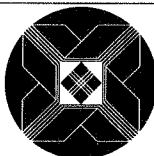
- More analysis of the problem, including further assessment of the technical issues, costs, options, and risks needs to be undertaken in a collaborative manner.

Key Models

Currently, as the major players are working through the choices for policy development, standards setting, and the economics of preserving digital information, a number of models are emerging. Ten stakeholder groups who will play a role in designing and testing possible models are: researchers or originators of information; publishers; repositories, libraries and museums; the national libraries and archives who operate legal deposit programs; the cooperative service agencies, e.g., OCLC and RLG; private storage providers; the scholarly associations; indexing and abstracting services; segmented market providers, e.g., UMI and ICPSR; and certified digital archives as proposed in a study by the Commission on Preservation and Access and the Research Libraries Group.

Reports from the Field

A regular feature in the *Transforming Libraries* series is the "Reports from the Field," which provides a snapshot view of how a number of organizations are approaching the problem at hand. While just about all the players agree that the most pressing problem is how to preserve the digital-only information, i.e., information that has



only existed in electronic form, this report features a mix of activities or experiments in preserving digital-only information as well as conversion to digital form for preservation purposes.

Featured are some of the varying institutional approaches to preserving digital information:

- The Cornell University and the National Agricultural Library Partnership, the National Preservation Program for Agricultural Literature.
- Harvard College Library's technical and tactical approach to digital library development.
- Just-in-case and just-in-time planning for digital preservation and access at the University of Michigan.
- A long history of regular, periodic migration at the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR).
- Responding to members needs is the focus of current operations and planning for the future at OCLC, while at RLG the focus is on building an infrastructure through projects and experimentation.
- In addition to the well publicized National Digital Library Program, the Library of Congress is involved in a number of initiatives, such as the Electronic Resources Project that focuses primarily on acquisition, collection, development, and use of electronic records, which includes working with national and international entities to address standards for electronic archival repositories.
- While working to build the electronic collections at the National Library of Canada, staff are currently focusing on acquiring government and non-commercial materials, and they also are aiming to acquire materials in standard formats such as SGML.

- Digital acquisitions at the Center for Electronic Records of the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) doubles every two years as more and more agencies are submitting electronic records.
- The Digital Library Federation, a program of the Council on Library and Information Resources, is moving forward the recommendations made in the CPA/RLG report, *Preserving Digital Information: Report of the Task Force on Archiving of Digital Information* (1996).

Additional Resources

This issue of *Transforming Libraries* includes an extensive list of additional resources—mostly accessible via the WWW. They include articles and publications as well as other projects or organizations who are also addressing the issue of preserving digital information.

This SPEC Kit was written by George Soete, Transforming Libraries Editor, and Mary Case, Director, ARL. Office of Scholarly Communication.

The electronic component of this issue can be found at <<http://www.arl.org/transform/pdi/>>.