

The No-Nonsense Guide to Born-Digital Content

HEATHER RYAN and WALKER SAMPSON

London, UK: Facet Publishing, 2018

240p. | ISBN 9781783301959 (Paperback) | 9781783302567 (PDF)

£59.95

I have been happy the past few years to pick up any book, which discusses born-digital in archives, so it came as no surprise that I would volunteer to review this one. With Facet Publishing as the imprint, I was keen to see how the born-digital arena would be covered from the basis of the *No-Nonsense Guide* series.

I had come across posts by Walker Sampson in my multiple listserv subscriptions but Heather Ryan's was previously unknown to me. They both currently work at the University of Colorado Boulder.

After a forward and an introduction, the content is presented in eight chapters covering firstly basic concepts and then moving through standard archival activities such as appraisal, accessioning, description, access, to end with an overview of new and emerging areas in born-digital materials.

The book covers varied types of born-digital content such as that found on obsolete media, 3D modelling, audio, relational databases, email as well as internet-based offerings such as websites and Twitter. I appreciated the comment, "Every bit of digital information is encoded in a physical space" (p.22). This reminded of a recent Mezzanine Group meeting in which was mentioned that 'the Cloud' in reality just means 'off-premise'. Passing acknowledgement was made of the ongoing time and resource requirements for managing born-digital content. There was also a good suggestion of creating hypothetical users during planning to ensure that user requirements would be met when considering access options.

However, for a book that purports to introduce readers to this discipline, I found the order of the chapters to be somewhat confusing. For example, an explanation is provided on how to ingest ("the process of placing your content into a repository system for digital content", p.xxiv) content before the presentation of preservation storage solutions. For me this was putting the cart before the horse. Remaining with this same example, it was covered at the end of the 32 page chapter entitled 'Acquisition, accessioning and ingest' and was all of a page long; I found the discussion of this topic to be rather unbalanced in relation to the rest of the material contained within the chapter. There were also certain

comments that left me wanting a more thorough explanation, such as when and why would one choose not to make a disk image.

Perhaps some of my disillusionment comes from my own understanding and assumptions in this discipline. I expected a more thorough presentation on preservation. I found the coverage of OAIS rather light, considering the model underlies many of the preservation systems available today, e.g. Rosetta (used by the National Library and Archives New Zealand), Archivematica, Preservica. Perhaps I should have read the title better, i.e. “content”, though I find it hard to be a guide to born-digital content targeted at archivists and librarians if preservation planning is not fully covered.

This book also suffers from some of the issues that Jacqueline Davidson (*Archifacts*, June 2016) identified for the Archives and Recordkeeping volume in this series including coming from the lifecycle perspective and saying that it is an introduction but finding that there were some underlying assumptions of some prior knowledge. I gave the book to a colleague who has very basic computer skills and asked if he would read the introduction and first chapter to ascertain how well it could reach its target readership. He acknowledged the inclusion of a list of 45 abbreviations and a glossary of 86 items, yet managed to create a list of at least another dozen or so terms with which he was not familiar in the Digital Information Basics chapter. He also needed to read some paragraphs a few times to grasp their meaning and though by the end of the chapter, he “came out loaded with terms, some concepts and what [he] perceived as partial explanations”. His parting comment to me was this chapter had not enthused him to keep reading. It is a case of reader beware.

Elizabeth Charlton