

Digital Preservation Essentials

ERIN O'MEARA and KATE STRATTON; edited by CHRISTOPHER J. PROM

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This book was given pride of place at the entrance to the book store at the Society of American Archivists' Annual Meeting in Atlanta in August 2016. It quickly sold out, so I was pleased to see it available for review for *Archifacts*.

Digital Preservation Essentials is part of the Trends in Archives Practice series. The series intends to fill gaps within the literature and provide timely and practical advice, authored and edited by skilled professionals.

The authors of this volume's modules, Erin O'Meara and Kate Stratton, are well qualified in the area of digital preservation, working at the Gates Archive. This is the private archives of the Gates family and focusses on digital collections. O'Meara's experience also encompasses the InterPARES 2 project as well as consulting on the BitCurator Project. The editor, Christopher Prom, is a former Fulbright Scholar, during which he researched practical methods to identify, preserve and provide access to electronic records. With such names on the cover, I knew that I would have an informative read.

The topic is separated into two modules, Module 12 "Preserving Digital Objects" and Module 13 "Digital Preservation Storage". While these areas are interlinked the information has been presented in stand-alone modules. They can also be purchased individually as EPUB or PDF.

When researching digital archiving for very small archives, I had come across much discussion on digital preservation systems but I had noticed a silence in the archival literature on the actual "nuts-and-bolts" storage options. I am starting to plan for a server upgrade that will run not only digital preservation but also day-to-day operational requirements for my archives. For these reasons, I went first to Module 13.

The first part of the module covers critical issues, best practices and mitigation strategies. For the uninitiated the content may appear overwhelming as the authors cover the core areas over a few pages, yet these technical concepts are the basis for the discipline. The outline of current storage options is a useful overview. For very small archives, I especially appreciated their recommendation to prioritise the transfer of content off CDs and DVDs, since they are not a reliable long-term storage media.

In the section, *Storage in Practice*, are listed many questions, which when worked through provide a basis to define an appropriate storage solution for one's repository. The advice and other sources will definitely assist me with this planning.

I had put much store on seeing the three case studies, though I was disappointed that they all emanated from university libraries. The bulk of SAA membership comes from the higher education sector, so it is understandable that this market is catered for; however, this selection could enhance a feeling of exclusion and isolation when one is not university-based. It also makes the challenge of implementation appear insurmountable when there is not an example from another type of institution, i.e. one could infer that digital preservation is something that only universities (or big institutions) can do. I can understand that smaller repositories may not actually have a digital preservation system up and running, so it could be hard to source a case study from another sector. A case study of an institution which is only now exploring options would have been more valuable for those of us embarking on digital preservation in a non-university setting. This aside, constructive tips are presented in the case studies.

Turning my attention to module 12, the introduction gives a clear yet concentrated overview. In-depth discussion starts with, "The preservation of digital objects is best approached incrementally, collaboratively, and iteratively" (p.12). O'Meara and Stratton introduce the National Digital Stewardship Alliance's Levels of Preservation as a model to follow as this provides practical, technical steps and suggest that the first goal in implementation is to reach Level 1. I agree with their position, though as a sole archivist there is quite a lot of work to do to attain that level along with all other incumbent tasks. I have in the past year partially completed the first bullet point! It does not help when you have more data than your current storage platform can hold.

Their explanation of the Open Archival Information System (OAIS) Reference Model and in particular its Archival Information Package takes up the bulk of the module. They have clearly translated the model into the most basic terms possible, though I retain an underlying inkling this could still appear too technical for beginners in the field. What I do appreciate are the worked examples for processing and ingest on pages 20 and 27; while at a somewhat high level they provide enough guidance to create a workflow for the same or similar content for one's own institution. "Spray and walk away" is not an option where digital preservation is concerned. O'Meara and Stratton offer a number of common preservation actions that digital objects require.

There is no escaping the technical nature of digital preservation and with the support of the glossary and footnotes, the authors have provided a comprehensive introduction to a core aspect of a 21st century archivist's toolkit. While the references themselves may become outdated, the use of Perma Link, which is an archived source of the referenced content, avoids link rot. Digital Preservation Essentials is a handy reference tool for archivists grappling with the concepts of digital preservation.

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