

Digital Preservation at Oxford and Cambridge

A collaborative research project to evaluate and provide sustainable recommendations for our digital preservation programmes

Planning is a verb

Posted on [31 October, 2016](#) by [Sarah](#)

In her [DPC](#) webinar on October 19, Nancy McGovern (MIT Libraries) spoke about '[Preservation Planning and Maturity Modelling](#)'. Maturity models are a great way to measure our progress as we look to solve some of our institutions' digital preservation issues. Without them, digital preservation would be an unending task with no benchmarks, no goals. And one of the things that stuck out in the talk were some words of wisdom from Nancy:

Planning is a verb, it is not something you can do once and you're done.

This is something that I think sits at the heart of digital preservation: this is not something we “do” and we're done. Technology is constantly changing and requires continual monitoring for new tools, applications, and obsolescence. This constantly shifting environment means there is no single, one-time solution to digital preservation. It is a coordinated effort between “technology, decision-making, and people.” None of these things remains constant, but are ever-changing. Decision-making tools (such as policies) and people (skills) are also the hardest part of digital preservation, because there is no one-size fits all for either one. In comparison, technology is relatively easy to manage and plan for.

Having maturity models provides the stepping stones for developing technology, decision-making, and people. If viewed all at once, the task of implementing a sustainable digital preservation programme

seems unlikely, but following steps makes it manageable and measurable. One such maturity model is [The Five Organizational Stages of Digital Preservation](#) (from Kenney & McGovern):

1. Acknowledge: Understanding that digital preservation is a local concern;
2. Act: Initiating digital preservation projects;
3. Consolidate: Segueing from projects to programs;
4. Institutionalize: Incorporating the larger environment; and
5. Externalize: Embracing inter-institutional collaboration and dependency.

(this is just one of many maturity models available, but it was referenced in the webinar)

And when Nancy spoke about this maturity model, she stressed the importance that your organisation might reach a level 5, but it might not stay a level 5 forever. The loss of an integral staff member, a shift in technology, or even starting a new digital collection or department would shift the balance again. This discussion only further reinforced for the that digital preservation is not something you can “set and forget,” but an on-going process.

Planning is also an important function in the [OAIS reference model](#) (preservation planning sits over the entire model). It is about monitoring external environments and recommending revisions or changes where necessary. Planning is essentially the “safeguard against a constantly evolving user and technology environment” (Lavoie, 2014). Meaning that where people and technology are involved, we are facing an ever-changing future; we must continually monitor and plan in order to provide long-term access to our digital assets.

After all, planning is a verb isn't it?

What do you think? Is digital preservation a solution you can do once and be done with or does it require ongoing support and development? Or something else entirely? Join the discussion below:

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