

Digital Preservation at Oxford and Cambridge

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

International Digital Preservation Day 2017 #IDPD17

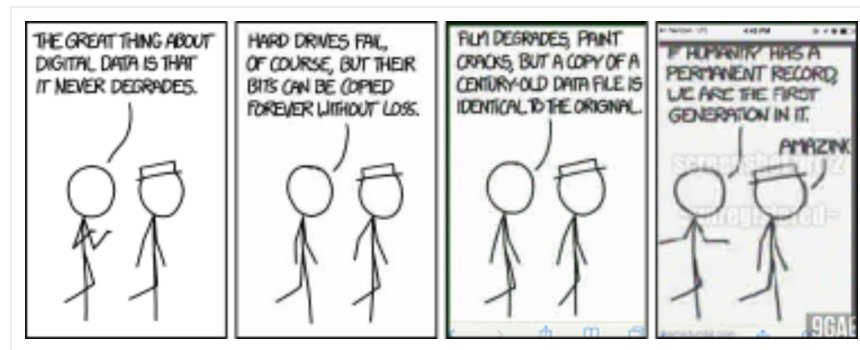
Posted on [30 November, 2017](#) by [Sarah](#)

It is International Digital Preservation Day. Today, around the world we celebrate the field that is fighting against time and technology to make sure that our digital “things” survive. And in turn, we are trying to make time and technology work with us.

We’re the people that see a 5.25” floppy disk and think “I bet I can read that. I wonder what I’ll find?” and we’re already making a list of where we can find the hardware and software to read it. We’re already dating it to wonder what kind of files would be on it, what software created those files—can we still find them? We’re willing to try, because every day that disk is ageing and every day is the possibility that when we get around to reading it, the data might be corrupted.

We’re the people fighting against the inevitable technological obsolescence, juggling media carriers, file formats, technological failures, software obsolescence and hardware degradation. It is like a carefully coordinated dance, where one wrong thing can end up in some sort of error. A file can’t open, or if I can open it what am I

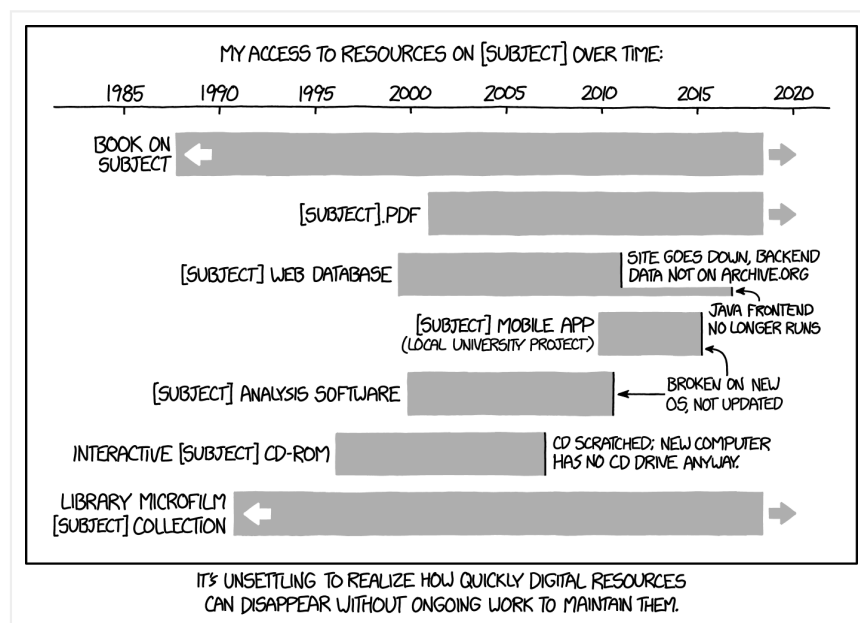
even staring at? We're trying to save our digital world, before it degrades and corrupts.



— Source: <https://xkcd.com/1683/>

Sometimes it's not always that dire, but it's the knowledge that if something gets overlooked, at some point – often in the blink of an eye – something will be lost. Something will be damaged. It's like playing a kind of Russian roulette, except for those of us who are custodians of unique digital collections, we can't take those chances. We cannot lose our digital assets, our digital “things” that we collect on behalf of the public, or for compliance reasons, or because we are keeping a record of the now for the future. After all, we have stories to tell, histories to save – what is it that we want to leave for the future?

If we don't consider preserving our digital “things” now, then we might not leave a story behind to tell.



— Source: <https://xkcd.com/1909/>

For some reason, while this is an issue we all struggle with (raise your hand if you've lost a digital file in your life or if your computer/tablet/phone has crashed and you lost everything and didn't have a backup) digital preservation is still something people don't know about or just don't talk about. *Why is something that we are all struggling with ignored so much? Is it because we're not speaking up enough? Is it because people just lose their stuff and move on, forgetting about it? When so much of our lives' records are now only digital, how can we just forget what we lose? How can we not care?*

The truth is we should. And we should all be looking to digital preservation in one form or another. From individuals to big business, digital preservation matters. It's not just for the cultural heritage and higher education institutions to "do" or to "worry" about. It involves you too.

The good news is that the world is starting to catch on. They are starting to look to us, the digital preservation practitioners, to see what they should do. They are starting to worry, starting to see the cracks in the digital world. Nothing lasts forever and sometimes in the digital world, it can be gone in a second with just a flick of a switch. Maybe it lives on somewhere, on those motionless hard drives, but without active management and commitment, even those hard drives will fail you some days. The events around the [Gothamist's shut down](#) of its online news sites (inc. DCist and LAist) has highlighted this. The recent [Slate article](#) of streaming only services has us worried about preservation of TV and film content that is born digital and so centralised, that it cannot rely on a [LOCKSS](#)-based approach (Lots of Copies Keeps Stuff Safe).

These are of course just some of the things we need to worry about. Just some of things we'll have to try to save. There's still the other approximately [2.5 quintillion bytes](#) (or roughly about 2.5 exabytes or 2.5 billion gigabytes) of data being created around the world *each day* to worry about. We're not going to keep it all, but we're going to want to keep some of it. And that some of it is rapidly increasing.

So this International Digital Preservation Day, I encourage everyone to think about their digital lives, at home and at work, and think about what you need to do to make your digital "things" last. There are a field of experts in the world, who are here to help. We are no further than a tweet away. We survive by collaborating and helping each other. And we're here to help you save the bits.

Want to learn more?

Visit the Digital Preservation Coalition for advice, reports and further information: <http://www.dpconline.org/>

Speak to the digital preservation hive mind on [Twitter](#) using any of these hashtags: #digitalpreservation #digipres #digpres

For more International Digital Preservation Day activities, visit: <http://www.dpconline.org/events/international-digital-preservation-day> or check out the hashtag #IDPD17

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About Sarah

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ONE THOUGHT ON “INTERNATIONAL DIGITAL PRESERVATION DAY 2017 #IDPD17”

ehalvarsson

on **30 November, 2017 at 10:40** said:

“Why is something that we are all struggling with ignored so much? [...] Is it because people just lose their stuff and move on, forgetting about it? When so much of our lives’ records are now only digital, how can we just forget what we lose? How can we not care?”

Well – this would make an interesting PhD and/or longitudinal study. *hint* *hint*

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