

Sustainability for Digital Community Archives

For *'First Steps: Caring for Photographs including Digital Preservation in Community Archives.'*

4 September 2019, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art 2



Sustainability for Digital Community Archives

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Supporting notes: <https://bit.ly/305drTa>

Practical exercises: <https://bit.ly/2yUWor7>

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What might a digital community archive look like?



What might a digital community archive look like?

- A website
- A YouTube page
- A social media page
- A Flickr page
- Files sitting on your computer
- Files on CDs, DVDs, USB sticks
- Files on an external hard drive
- ...any collection of digital material that you think tells your story!
- Photos
- Videos (e.g. recordings of events, interviews)
- Audio recordings (e.g. oral history interviews, music)
- Documents (e.g. Microsoft Office documents, pdfs)
- Web pages
- Social media posts
- Emails
- Very large
- Very small
- Entirely run by volunteers
- Semi-professional
- Long-established
- Very recent
- Partnered with other organisations
- Completely independent
- Entirely digital
- Part digital, part physical

What are the threats to sustaining a digital archive?

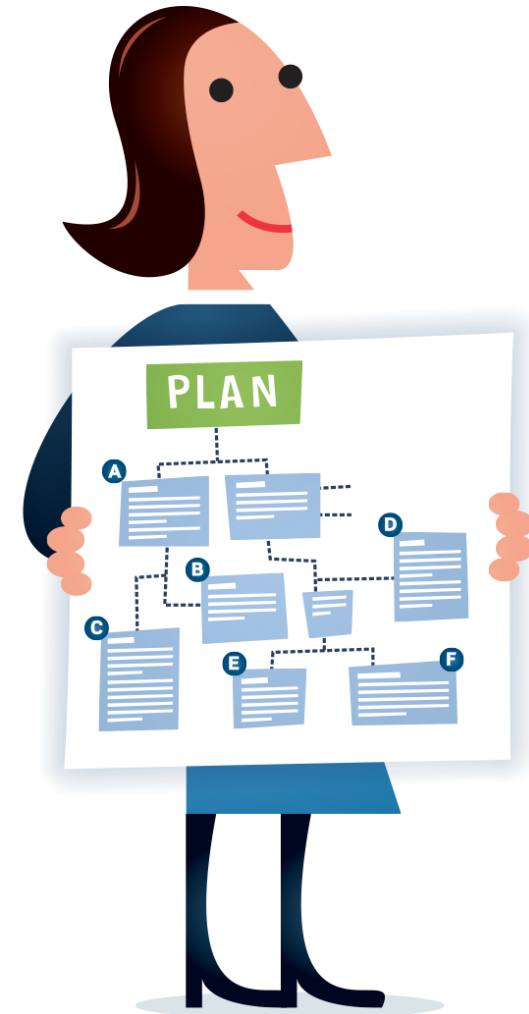


What are the threats to sustaining a digital archive?

- Technical failure – maybe your hard drive stops working
- Obsolescence – sometimes hardware, software, operating systems, and file formats go out of use.
- Human error – you or someone else might accidentally delete or change your digital stuff
- Natural disaster – your IT equipment might get damaged in a flood or fire
- Attack – somebody might deliberately try to wreck your digital archive
- Bad management – it's hard to use archives when the file names are random or unhelpful, or files are disorganised
- Lack of money – you might run out of money for digital storage, website hosting etc.
- Lack of will/support/time – your group might not have enough time or support to keep your digital archive going, you tried to keep too much.

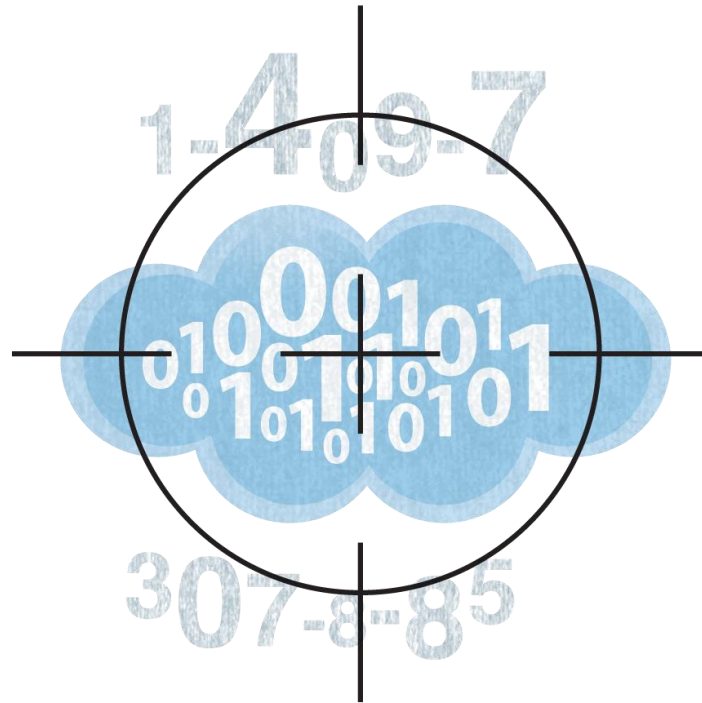
What can we do?

1. Choose what you want to preserve
2. Get hold of it
3. Keep it safe
4. Manage it
5. Make use of it



1. Choose what you want to preserve

You will probably not have the time, money, and expertise to preserve everything - so you will have to be selective!



1. Choose what you want to preserve

Are there multiple versions of this? Do I need all of them, some of them, or only one?

Will somebody else preserve this? Am I happy to let them do that?

Does it fit well with the rest of my collection?

Is it a copy of a physical item? Can I keep one rather than both?

Am I legally obliged to keep this?

Is it going to be too expensive to keep (e.g. do the files require a lot of storage space)?

Is it too late to save it?

Do I know what it is? Am I likely to be able to work it out?

Is it published elsewhere?

Does it contain personal, sensitive information?

Does it contain copyright material?

Do I know who owns the copyright?

2. Get hold of it

See the practical exercises at: <https://bit.ly/2yUWor7>



3.Keep it safe



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3.Keep it safe

A simple principle to follow is that the more copies you have of your digital archive, that safer it will be.

A good rule of thumb to follow is the '3-2-1' rule. This suggests that you:

- Keep at least 3 copies of your files
- Store your copies on at least 2 separate devices
- Store 1 copy in a different physical location

For example, if you have an archive of digital photos you might want to keep a copy on your PC, a copy on a laptop, and a copy in cloud storage.

4. Manage it

Know what you have – could keep a list in a spreadsheet.

Organise your archive:

- file names
- folders
- getting rid of duplicates
- describe what you have

Check your copies periodically.



5. Make use of it



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5. Make use of it

The whole point of preserving your digital archive is to make use of it!

Letting people use your archive is a good way of finding out if you're doing a job in collecting and preserving the right things in the right way – encourage people to let you know what they think.

Remember that some you may have to restrict access to some items in your archive if they are unsuitable for viewing by the public. This might include considerations around copyright and GDPR.

5. Make use of it

If your archive takes the form of a website or social media page, then it is already publicly accessible – congrats!

But if your archive is otherwise inaccessible, you may want to think about sharing your archive through:

- Letting people know that your archive exists, and how to contact you
- Making a website
- Adding your collections to an existing website
- Adding your collections to a social media platform

Other things to think about



Other things to think about...

- **File formats** - Sometimes files in certain formats become impossible or difficult to use because the software or hardware needed to open them is obsolete or hard to get. You'll want to store files in formats that are likely to remain usable in the long term.
- **Transferring Files** - Sometimes when you are transferring files from one location to another, there can be errors in the copying process, and changes in things like the 'created' and 'modified' dates. If you have the time and resources, it would be a good idea to take some extra steps to prevent this from happening, and to keep some evidence that the transfer has gone according to plan.

Other things to think about...

Fixity and checksums

It's important that people using your digital archive can trust that the files they are looking at hasn't been changed over time, deliberately or accidentally.

In digital preservation, the assurance that a file has remained the same (that it is 'fixed') is called 'fixity'. It's a term you will see a lot in the sources I've linked to.

People working with digital archives often use something called a 'checksum' to prove a file's fixity. You can think of a checksum as a 'digital fingerprint' unique to a file. A checksum can be generated using specially made tools.

Other things to think about...

Partnerships and collaborations

Going it alone when managing a community digital archive can be difficult, and partnerships and collaborations with other people and organisations can help keep things sustainable.

When entering into partnerships or collaborations, consider:

- if the organisation you're partnering or collaborating with shares your values and is appropriate to work with your collection
- if the partnership or collaboration is fair – that you are not doing all the work
- if you need a formal agreement stating who is responsible for what
- if you have a clear plan
- if responsibilities are clear
- you can leave the partnerships or collaboration, and how that would work.

Other things to think about...

Copyright

Copyright law applies to digital archives just as much as it applies to physical archives. It has some implications for what you can keep, what you can copy, and what you can publish online. Thinking about it early will help you avoid preserving files that you cannot use.

General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

If your digital archive contains personal data (e.g. names, addresses, emails) you will need to consider the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Other things to think about...

Professional Standards

Archivists have developed lots of professional standards to help them manage archives, including digital collections. You'll see lots of them mentioned in the guidance linked to in this document.

You might find it useful to use them because:

- They represent current best practice in archive management
- They help make your archive interoperable
- The standards are documented

However, some community archives prefer not to use professional standards, or only use bits of them, because:

- They find the standards too difficult to use
- They don't think the standards are very good
- They don't think the standards are suitable for their collection

Thank you for listening!

- Please do look at the supporting notes at: <https://bit.ly/305drTa>
There are links to useful resources throughout the notes, and a big list of further reading at the end.
- If you have any questions or feedback you can contact me at:
Email: sean.rippington@gmail.com
Twitter: @SeanRippington