



Review

Practical Digital Preservation: A How-to Guide for Organizations of Any Size

Adrian Brown. Chicago: Neal-Schuman, 2013. 352 pp. ISBN: 978-1-55570-942-6. \$88.00.

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In our increasingly digital environment, institutions of all sizes and missions must confront the issue of how to maintain and provide access to a variety of digital materials. In *Practical Digital Preservation*, Adrian Brown provides a comprehensive and accessible overview of the concepts, approaches, and strategies required for memory institutions, libraries, and archives looking to get a handle on what digital preservation means for them and their users. Brown's focus on the principles and concepts underlying digital preservation as well as his use of case studies and exemplars makes his work an excellent primer for information professionals seeking to establish their own digital repositories.

Brown divides his work into ten chapters, which are neatly subdivided, and concludes each chapter with a summation in the form of "Key Points." He assists his readers further by providing a glossary of the many terms involved in digital preservation, three appendices, and a bibliography. The first chapter serves to introduce readers—who Brown presumes are current professionals or practitioners in museums, libraries, archives and the like—to what digital preservation means and dispels the surrounding myths. Brown defines the overarching aim of digital preservation as: "To maintain the object of preservation for as long as required, in a form which is authentic, and accessible to users" (p. 3). Digital preservation is "an *outcome*, which can be achieved by many different means, and at varying levels of complexity, to suit the needs and resources of the organization in question" (p. 4). Thus, there isn't a one-size-fits-all

approach to digital preservation. Rather, an organization's individual context will dictate how to begin and maintain a digital preservation program to best serve its needs.

In his second and third chapters, Brown helps institutions discover their context and develop a solid conceptual underpinning for any digital preservation activities. In chapter two, institutions learn to identify their drivers for digital preservation, the challenges they may face, and how to distill that into a business case that can be used to advocate for support. Central to this process is the development of a digital preservation policy and digital asset register. The third chapter builds on these key documents and the context they define by helping institutions understand their requirements for a digital preservation solution. Here, Brown covers identifying and conversing with stakeholders, articulating and documenting requirements, and then applying these requirements to find a solution that fits. He exhorts readers to learn from other institutions and provides a variety of examples. The creation of these plans and documents are presented in clear logical steps and are accompanied by visual presentations of the necessary steps as well as representative examples from other institutions. This approach is very effective in taking what feels like a potentially overwhelming task and making it feel doable.

Now that the groundwork has been laid, the fourth chapter begins the discussion of actually implementing digital preservation. This is a weighty chapter and again asks the readers to think critically about what they are trying to accomplish with digital preservation. There is much weighing of pros and cons as Brown presents a number of options for systems, their implementation, and their maturation. He aids the reader with six case studies that manage to tie together all the various options and also includes an excellent section on training. Yet, what is particularly important in this chapter is a discussion on the importance of trust. By trust, Brown means that digital repositories can be relied upon to provide services to "those who deposit content" and "those who consume preserved content" (p. 82). Those of us in the field who work in libraries and the like take this trust for granted, but that's not necessarily the case in the digital world. The use of established standards and sound theoretical basis can ensure that a repository remains trusted and functional.

The fifth and sixth chapters together "address how digital repositories acquire content" (p. 109). The fifth chapter focuses on the initial steps of selecting and acquiring material for a digital repository. Institutions learn how to build off of existing processes for selecting and acquiring physical materials while also uncovering the different legal and technical implications that come with digital materials. Chapter six covers the second step of accessioning and ingesting, processes that bring material under "the physical and intellectual control of the repository" (p. 129). In this chapter, decision trees and case studies, as well as the parallels Brown draws to the accessioning and ingest of physical materials, aid the readers in the development of their own standards and processes.

The next three chapters detail processes surrounding materials once they fall under the purview of a repository. Chapter seven covers the creation of metadata in a digital

repository, essentially how to go about describing your objects for both internal and external use. Readers are provided with an excellent overview of the existing standards and options available as well as a good discussion on the various uses or purposes of metadata in digital collections. Chapter eight is about actually preserving the now ingested and described material. This is what Brown considers “the very heart of digital preservation—the strategies and techniques required to ensure that digital information remains accessible and usable over the long term” (p. 193). In this chapter, the previous analogies to physical objects and collections begin to break down as digital materials present new and different preservation challenges. Brown suggests that in the digital realm, practitioners need to reconsider long-held concepts such as originality and decay, and risks and legal issues that would never come up with say a collection of papers or a book. Again, Brown emphasizes that there is no “panacea” (p. 213) and helps practitioners identify the methods best suited to their contexts and needs.

Chapter nine discusses how to get those materials and descriptions out to the user—the culmination of preservation work and a key task in establishing trust with user communities. This is really the reason for preservation—to get the materials out to those who want to use it now and keep it available for users in the future. Many of the considerations here will be familiar to librarians who provide a catalog or similar service and the accompanying case studies provide excellent examples of current practice. The tenth and final chapter is a brief look at areas of growth and future movements in digital preservation, particularly looking at emerging technologies and trends. Some notable ideas presented are the emergence of Preservation-as-a-Service (Praas), as discussion on storage technologies, and areas of future research.

The greatest strength of Brown’s work is his ability to break complex processes down in such a way as they can be easily understood and accomplished. This is further aided by his providing readers with numerous exemplars that fit institutions of a variety of sizes and missions. Likewise, his helping his readers take a close look at their own needs, experience, and context before they move forward into digital preservation establishes a strong foundation for their own preservation work. This work would be a useful primer for a librarian or archivist desiring to establish digital preservation programs or anyone looking to understand digital preservation as a whole.

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