From Preservation Guide

Main: Preservation Guide - Develop a Strategy

3. Collection Strategy

This guide is to preservation, not how to run your archive or predict the future. So this section isn't about how to make a strategy – it's a reminder that preservation is a strategic issue. Preservation is about keeping your cruise ship watertight – but with a new, streamlined hull you may be able to reach new ports, and provide new services.

Your long-term strategy must fit your particular circumstances, but the following issues will probably be

Develop a Strategy	
Collection Strategy	**Preservation Strategy**
Long-term purpose **Access** **Required changes** **What preservation contributes**	**Selection** **Conservation** **Restoration** **Digitisation** **Documentation**

important to all collections.

3.1 Long-term purpose of the preservation work Where are you going, and can preservation work actually assist you – rather than being seen as just another burden on the budget? Audiovisual preservation is complex, but for most collections the technical future is clear, and has five parts:

- moving audio and video content from analogue carriers into digital files; this move allows mass-produced industry-standard storage to be used for audiovisual content – and means the end of all the special players and other technology previously required.
- holding those

Preservation is about staying afloat, but where are you going?

files on some form of mass storage
- reducing maintenance costs and simplifying maintenance procedures
- making low-quality access copies (CD, DVD)
- providing web access.

In summary, the 'big five' for archives and digital preservation processes are:

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*       digital files               more information from PrestoSpace?
*       mass storage                more information from PrestoSpace?
*       cheaper, better maintenance more information from PrestoSpace?
*       CD, DVD access copies       more information from PrestoSpace?
*       web access                  more information from PrestoSpace?
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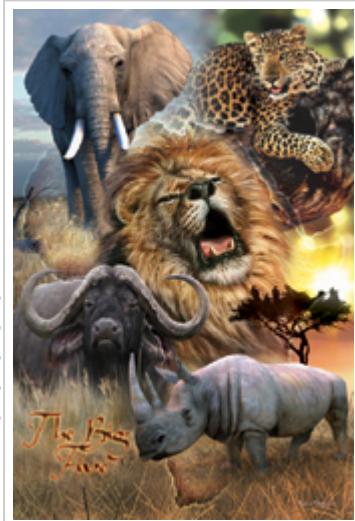

Archives have a Big Five

Top 3.2 Access Audiovisual material has always had access problems, technical, legal and procedural. The move into digital technology can remove many of the technical barriers to access, but the others are then more exposes – and may prove equally limiting. The most embarrassing consequence would be for access to be physically

possible, only to find that the standard practices or even simply the habits of the collection managers are the real barrier.

So the basic questions are: are you ready for much wider access? Are there legal problems? Will staff work practices have to change?

Technical barriers

Technical: new technology allows audiovisual material to be viewed and auditioned from standard computer workstations. These cost much less than professional video equipment, although they are not cheaper than CD and VHS players that may already be in use for viewing. The move to digital files could make it affordable to expand in-house viewing facilities. For collections that serve a business, a first consequence of having digital files is the expectation by all staff that they should have instant access to the material. For collections that serve the public there will equal pressure for instant access. It will prove very hard to require pre-booking of material once it's been digitised – user's simply won't accept that the delay is reasonable.

Legal barriers

- **Legal:** the main issue is providing access outside the walls of your collections. Most audiovisual collections have never provided such access, and many have words in their charter or other foundation documents, assuming that people will come to their institution for access – possibly even only for 'research access'. Copyright compliance may be seen to require this attendance. As with pre-booking material, in an on-line world it will be increasingly hard to defend these policies and restrictions. They

will be challenged. With the technical barrier removed, copyright law in general – and the wording of institutional charters in particular – will come under heavy attack. The barriers will certainly be shifted, if not dismantled.

Even if the law is not a problem, public access via the web may changes the nature and level of public access. Demand could surge. Different kinds of enquiry could arise, as access becomes more democratic and less exclusive. For web access, there will be no friendly librarian to guide people in the right direction, and exclude them from inappropriate material. Children will be able to see the whole website, and for war and holocaust and other materials this general access could be seen as inappropriate. Overall the collection access must be reconsidered, and planned. This all should be good news – collections are there to be used, not to lie dormant – but the pitfalls are there as well.

Are you ready for public access?

Procedural: online access means, basically, self-help. There is no member of staff to locate materials. Is your documentation adequate for use by the general public? What controls should there be on public access to meet legal and age-related requirements? Does your collection or institution want to serve the general public at all? Will staff see it as 'dumbing down', or as generating uninformed nuisance enquiries? Do staff prefer to deal with a few professional researchers on site, rather than the great unwashed loafing in the public access areas, and the even greater general population clogging up the web server with their unprofessional browsing? Most collections wish for greater access – but this is definitely an area where the consequences should be thought out, where all involved should 'be careful what they wish for'.

Ref to R Wright, B&G paper; will it ever come out?[?]

Top 3.3 Required changes to how the collection is managed Planning for preservation of archive contents should fit into the bigger picture of plans for general development and management of the collection. The collection could continue its acquisition, curation, cataloguing, research and dissemination activities just as before – but how these operations are performed could all be revisited. Again, this guide is about preservation, not about everything to do with running an audiovisual collection – so here is just a short list of collection management activities that could be affected by preservation.

- **acquisition:** changes here include:
  - directly acquiring digital materials, perhaps electronically rather than by physical media
  - managing the digital ingest: getting new material into the digital system; ingest may mean digitisation or just format conversion
- **cataloguing:** if the material is online, so the cataloguing should be done online. If the cataloguing process includes anything that is written on paper and later typed in – or uses printed guides or other authority materials – it could perhaps save time and money and raise quality if the whole process were reconsidered as an end-to-end online workflow
- **curation:** this term means many things, but it often involves selection – for exhibits and special collections or any other special treatment. The selection can now be done online, which again could save time and money.
- **research:** with the catalogue and the content online, research strategies alter. It used to be effective to have extensive documentation, so that material pulled off the shelves and loaded into a player had a high probability of being just what was wanted. With online material, a researcher can – very quickly – check through key frames (thumbnails) and audio or video clips. The need for precision reduces, affecting both cataloguing and research.
- **dissemination:** this is probably the area of greatest potential change. The originals never leave storage, technical restrictions on access disappear, web technology can be used to access the collection. The whole effort to reach out from the collection to the community it serves should be reconsidered to make best use of the new technology and its possibilities.

Top 3.4 What the preservation project should contribute As already indicated, preservation work could significantly affect **access**. As seen in the previous section, there is a relationship between digitised, online materials and all other work areas in a collection. The preservation strategy stage is a good time to look at all the required or possible changes and improvements that could be made to the operation of the collection – to the collection management – and ensure that the preservation strategy includes the work necessary to support those changes, where possible.

The activity that is central to most preservation projects is handling the individual media. Each item involved in the project will be taken off the shelf, examined, checked for correction of documentation, played (in most cases) and documented (or the documentation will be corrected or improved, at least for many projects). All this is labour intensive, manual work. The point is, adding a step to the process – such as making two copies instead of one, or making a web-copy as well as a new master, or repackaging the originals – has a much lower marginal cost than would be the case if for a project to just make a web copy, or just repackage the originals.

A preservation project can be divided into two kinds of activity: logistics, and processing. Logistics refers to the task of getting material off the shelves, identified, into the hands of somebody doing some processing – and then back onto the shelves with update of the database to reflect any changes. This logistics work is kind of an overhead – it has to happen, but it doesn't do anything to improve preservation.

Processing is the activity that actually makes a change. The key idea is, adding a processing stage doesn't increase the logistics cost at all – it just has a marginal cost equal to the cost if the stage itself – and it gets its logistics for free.

All this means that the cheapest possible time to do ANYTHING that involves getting material off the shelf and into someone's hands, is during a preservation project. Each extra stage adds a marginal cost, but is saves the logistics cost that would be involved if the stage was done independently.

Recognition of the effective cost reduction involved in adding a stage to a preservation project can change decision making: an operation that was to expensive to do on its own, can become cost-effective when incorporated into a preservation plan.

Just a few examples of activities that could be included in a preservation project are:
- Installation of new shelving
- A full inventory check
- Repackaging
- Photographing or scanning the packaging
- Getting metadata off the packaging, or checking it for accuracy

So preservation work is expensive and time-consuming and demands resources – but it also opens opportunities: not just to change the archive content to include digital files and online materials, but also to do any number of other housekeeping and upgrading operations.

But housekeeping is the minor issue.. The major issue for preservation that involves digitisation is the potential for radically changing access. The whole access issue should have been thoroughly examined already, and the collection management should agree a strategy for access and any other changes, as discussed above in section 3.3. The collection strategy should then feed into the preservation strategy, to make strategic use of the preservation project.

Top 3.5 Planning stages For any sizeable project, the work will extend over years. This means that the strategy will need to extend over years also. That all gets a bit complicated. The obvious approach for dealing with the problem is to divide the archive strategy – and the preservation strategy – into stages. One typical set of stages is:
- immediate steps (1-2 years)
- mid-range steps (3-5 years)
- long-range steps (beyond 5 years)

Strategic goal or activity	immediate (1-2 years)	mid-range (3-5 years)	long-range (beyond 5 years)
Start collection website	X		
Put catalogue online	X		
Clear selected content for public website		X	
Align catalogue with standards for a common portal		X	
Have all digitised content available on website			X

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Page last modified on March 08, 2013, at 07:57 AM