



InterPARES 3 Project

International Research on Permanent Authentic Records in Electronic Systems

Title: Case Study 08 – North Vancouver Museum and Archives (NVMA): Customizable Versions of Products

Brochure 1. Maintaining Your Digital Records

Status: Final (public)

Version: 1.0

Last Revised: October 2010

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Project Component: Knowledge Mobilization

URL: http://www.interpares.org/display_file.cfm?doc=ip3_canada_cs08_brochure-1.pdf

Document Control

Version history			
<u>Version</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>By</u>	<u>Version notes</u>
1.0	2010-10-15	C. McLellan, S. Malmas	First public version.

Maintaining Your Digital Records

These guidelines have been developed to help individuals and small volunteer organizations understand and preserve their digital records. The preservation of digital records requires more planning and periodic intervention than is necessary for traditional records.

This guide offers practical advice and tips that can be applied with minimal resources. If your well-cared-for records find their way into an archival repository, the community as a whole will also benefit, and so will posterity.

Step 1: Appoint a **trusted custodian**

This person will take responsibility for the overall care of all your records after you are no longer able to, particularly those that you identify as vital. This can be a family member, the secretary of your organization or the community archivist. In some cases, the trusted custodian could be the records creator.

Trusted custodian

A preserver who can be trusted not to alter the records or allow others to alter them. This person is responsible for ensuring the preservation of the records over time.

Step 2: Take charge of your records

- Create a document that explains how they are organized. This may be a document that outlines how you label your family photos and explains how your documents are filed in named folders. Make sure this document is updated and known to your trusted custodian.
- Create another document outlining how your records are stored. List the digital records formats you use (such as, DOCX, JPEG, MP3, and PDF), and for what purposes you use them.
 - Do you have important information on floppy disks? How old are they? Are you still able to access that information?
 - Do you have CDs? Are they gold standard?
- List details of the software and hardware you are using, and keep the original documentation or manuals.
- Make a plan for changes that should be made within the next few years (see Step 4 Preventing loss for more information).

Warning!

Heat, light, and moisture are all enemies of long term digital storage media. Store your digital media in a cool, dark dry area to prolong their lifespan.

Step 3: Plan for hardware and software obsolescence

Software and hardware typically become obsolete after five years. To avoid losing your records it is important to:

- Frequently upgrade the technology you use to create and maintain your records.
- Keep the document outlining the storage of your digital records up-to-date.

Avoid obscure formats! Using obscure (non-standard) formats increases preservation risks, as their technical support may quickly disappear. As part of knowing your records, plan to move from non-standard to standards or well known and widely used computer file formats, such as PDF, TIFF, DOCX, .WAV/.AIFF.

Step 4: Preventing loss

If your hard drive crashes you could lose all your family photographs or records vital to you as an individual and/or for the daily operations of your organization.

Preventing the loss of digital records may be avoided by ensuring you have a safety copy of your computer files. There are several ways to do this:

- Purchase an external hard drive (\$100-\$200) and copy all of your important documents.
- Use a USB Key (\$20-\$50) to make and keep copies of your most valuable documents.
- Back up regularly! Have a schedule.

More things to consider!

Location of safety copy: Consider pairing up with a friend; update regularly together and swap safety copies in case of fire. You may want to have two safety copies: one on an external hard drive or one on a USB key stored in a safe location, like a safety deposit box, or fire proof safe.

Life of safety copy: Technology does not remain stable. It is important to keep updating your safety devices. USB keys and other storage devices may break and the information on them will degrade overtime.

Security: Digital records are very susceptible to accidental, unauthorized or malicious alteration. To help safeguard your records against these hazards, consider saving your finalized documents in widely used stable, hard to modify, file formats like PDF, so they remain accessible over time and cannot be accidentally changed.

Avoid lossy compression: Some file formats use lossy compression to store items at a smaller file size than the original in the process losing some information, such as .JPEG. Instead, consider saving your photographs using TIFF.

E-Mail: In pre-digital times bundles of letters were treasured and handed down to future generations; currently there is a different attitude towards correspondence and e-mails are not kept in the same way. Consider printing, or saving outside your e-mail host, correspondence of special significance (tales of a daughter's travels or letters from the cousin in Afghanistan). It is important to develop criteria for keeping and maintaining e-mail over time. Please see the other brochure in this series titled "Managing E-mail" for more detailed information.

Facebook, Flickr and other social networks and e-mail service providers (gmail, yahoo): Do not rely on social networking sites for preservation! When you post your photographs on these sites you are giving up control; your photographs and other documents become property of these businesses. If these companies go out of business or have poor preservation practices you are likely to lose access to your records.

Not all documents need to be kept forever: Think about which of your documents can be discarded. Delete those files that have no long term value to you or your organization.

Creating paper copies: You need not leave all your materials in digital form. A simpler preservation practice may be to print important records and file them with your paper records. For example, you may wish to have your photographs or the minutes of your organization's meetings printed.

Additional resources

InterPARES 2 Project. *Creator Guidelines: Making and Maintaining Digital Materials: Guidelines for Individuals*. <http://www.interpares.org>

InterPARES 2 Project. *Preserver Guidelines: Preserving Digital Records: Guidelines for Organizations*. <http://www.interpares.org>

InterPARES 3 Project. *Managing E-Mail*. [Institution name] brochure series.

InterPARES 3 Project. *Consider Donating Your Records to your Local Archives*. [Institution name] brochure series.

[Institution contact information]

