
From Preservation Guide

Main: The Future of Audiovisual Materials

8. Future Developments & Considerations

The goal of these guidelines is to increase the efficiency of audiovisual preservation. The information provided here in this Preservation Guide is essentially about technology, and the strategy for effective use of technology. But technology is not the whole picture. The other major influences, from copyright to funding, are all to some degree political issues rather than technological. What changes in the political outlook can be expected?

8.1 Political

There is already a major effort for coordination of digitisation at national levels, centred around the NRG [1] and project Minerva [2]. The emphasis of their work has not been on audiovisual material - it has been on paper and to some extent on photographs. However paper and photographs have pioneered the areas of public web access, so audiovisual collections have much to learn from their work. It is possible that the coordination (at the European level) or work being physically done at the national level may lead to some actual European-level development. Certainly portals are already being planned (i2010 and TEL), and actual public repositories could be established at the European level. There is already one privately funded public European repository: the European Archive.

Portals could move in two ways: wider in holdings, and more narrow in scope. It makes little sense to have dozens of disconnected 'railway history' portals across Europe (and the world), so consolidation is likely, and will squeeze out those collections that decline to participate in the portal approach. This means that physical institutions (bricks and mortar) have an interesting challenge: their main chance for web attention is via subject-area portals, which emphasise content at the expense institutional identity. A portal with railway images from several dozen collections should attract wider public interest that would be achieved by one regional collection - but the user of the portal may be completely unaware of the 'bricks and mortar' institution that is responsible for pictures getting onto the portal in the first place.

Thus many institutions are advocating being a 'library without walls' or similar phrase, but there is a risk of losing institutional identity altogether, as content is aggregated either by portals or by search engines. At least with a portal there is institutional agreement and cooperation. Search engine aggregation technology is quite independent, operating totally outside institutional control. The only choice an online collection has (regarding search engines) is the choice between opening their catalogue and content, or keeping it closed. Opening it could lead to 'attention without recognition', as people find material from an institution without realising the institution's vital role. Closing access to search engines just leads to nobody finding the collection: no attention and hence no recognition. Use of the web to achieve institutional recognition and prominence is not straightforward.

From the public viewpoint, attitudes will also change. As more and more becomes web-accessible, those institutions which do not provide such access will be seen as withholding their content from the public. This pressure is increased by the various 'open' movements (Open Source, Creative Commons, shareware, file sharing ...) which all increase the public expectation that public content should, as a matter of course, be available, free, on the internet. The key word is 'public',

because much of the material in audiovisual collections (eg commercial music, radio and television programmes) is heavily bound by copyright, and is not at all public. The pressure in Europe arises with respect to public service broadcasting. If people feel they've paid for it already (through a public service broadcasting licence), they expect to have access.

It is quite possible that copyright law - or the interpretation of copyright law - will change to allow greatly expanded public access to web-quality content, within 'fair use' copyright provisions.

8.2 Technological

On the technology side, the good news is:

- the worst will be over; digitisation of analogue content should be the hardest single step every taken in the history of an audiovisual item. Once digitised, further migrations should be significantly cheaper and faster, and of guaranteed quality.
- storage costs will continue to decrease; they have done for more than 20 years, and enough is known about the next 10 years to be confident that the trend will be maintained.
- access will increase and improve - In the UK, broadband internet went from 15% to 75% (of homes with an internet connection) in under three years [3].

Technology and politics are not independent, and the increase in broadband internet connections will increase the demand for political change regarding access to audiovisual material - particularly public service broadcast material.

Finally, institutions may not like to pay maintenance on computer systems, but they have gotten used to it. This fact should make it easier to achieve built-in maintenance of audiovisual archive content - once it sits on computer mass storage technology.

References

1. National Representatives Group, the collective body covering all European digitisation work at the national level; coordinates with Minerva
2. <http://www.minervaeurope.org/>
3. <http://www.websiteoptimization.com/bw/0510/>

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