

## Libraries in a digital age

As we move, albeit slowly, towards a paperless future there has to be some consideration of the role of the library and the task of the librarian in the digital age. For many reasons the digital archive is far from secure and in spite of claims by the storage media makers there is still some doubts as to the longevity of some if not all of the media currently employed.

Given the fugitive nature of the media and the somewhat convulsive nature of the software used to generate the data on it, archivists may be forgiven for being somewhat skeptical about the value of the digital archive. But with the way that things are going we owe it to the market place to make some attempt to co-ordinate, classify and preserve the digital realm.

Adobe and others have shown just how compact a digital archive can be compared with its physical counterpart. Add to that the accessibility inherent in search engines and somehow the world of archiving will never be the same.

Some major archiving organisations have fully embraced the potential and the drawbacks of the digital archive. Notably the National records Office at Kew. (<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk>) This and others like the British Library, the international virtual library and the Smithsonian to name but three, celebrate the richness of archive material on line. Somehow though, one gets the feeling that traditional librarians are less than fascinated by the digital world.

As long term guardians of the physical manifestation of literacy, many libraries seem reluctant and unable to cope with the challenges of the digital age. With less and less money available to promote books per se, they turn to video, DVD and audio recordings to grab the audience without themselves seeing the dichotomy inherent in this process.

The stability of software programmes like Adobe Acrobat which go a long way to solve the problems of access to text on screen, and the capability of the audience to deal with it, should to a large measure reassure people about the viability of the alternatives to physical print material. And although the screen experience still falls far short of the physical delight of handling a printed book, the number of people I have seen on buses tubes and trains accessing the printed word through telephones and PDAs bears testimony to the robustness of the word.

Now as we enter a new post literate age it is time to engage in a dialogue to better understand the needs of physical archiving and the vision that public libraries have of existence in the hyper-digital age.

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Meeting April 1st Central Library Exeter 4pm

Two links added by Will Pollard

<http://www.aiim.org/standards.asp?ID=25013> Draft standard on PDF for archiving

[http://www.contentreserve.com/Resources/CPL\\_case\\_study.pdf](http://www.contentreserve.com/Resources/CPL_case_study.pdf) Cleveland case study

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