Developing an Archiving Strategy: Why archive?

The first question for a publisher (or author) to address in developing an archiving strategy is: why archive the work at all?

One primary motivation is to enable a reader at some time in the future to be able to access the content of the publication.

What do we know about a future reader? If we consider a reader (say) 100 years from now, it seems reasonable to assume that:

1. the reader will be using a completely new technology that is not compatible with any of the (now redundant) formats used in today's publication
2. that every single url/link to content outside the digital ebook is broken (linkrot).

And so that future reader will need:

- a mechanism to discover that the work exists at all, and
- a way to both access the content and understand the author's work.

So we can state that **a primary archiving and preservation objective** for a publisher is:

> **To provide a future reader with ways to discover and engage with the publication, when the formats used in the publication are incompatible with the future reader's technology and all external links within the publication are broken.**

Solutions will necessarily require strategies to ensure:

1. the discovery of the work's existence - requiring the transition of book metadata over time,
2. the discovery of the publication files themselves - requiring the transition of the book files over time
3. access to file content by the new technologies - requiring format migration, and
4. the reconstruction of both the links to external content and access to (the archived version of) that content.

Of course one strategy is to do nothing now and assume that the future managers of the publisher will take full responsibility for all these actions when the time comes. But most small publishers recognise that neither the existence or the financial health of future managers is guaranteed! Consequently, any successful preservation strategy will need to rely on future (potentially

unknown) third parties undertaking some of this work for them. The important question for a small publisher then becomes:

What can I do today to make the job of reconstructing this publication for future readers by unknown third-party agents as easy as possible?

In the next sections we look at some of the main issues to consider for a publisher in developing such a strategy.

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