The distant future of the recent past

The outlook for newspaper collections in the born-digital era
From the archives

JPEG corruption, 1997-2006
From the archives

JPEG corruption, 1997-2006
From the archives

Server software upgrade, 2005

Victoria McCargar

California Newspapers in the Digital Age
From the archives

Obsolete software, 1991-2003

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California Newspapers in the Digital Age
And then there’s copyright

Page facsimile vs. access to content
Tomorrow’s newspaper tonight

• The basics (mid-1970s to present)
  – Reporters write, editors edit, artists draw, photographers shoot
  – Layout editors create pages, electronic production processes get them to press
  – Presses roll
  – Post-production processes capture text and images for storage and retrieval
  – Microfilm and text sales
Tomorrow’s newspaper tonight

- But wait! (2000-present)
  - Add video, animation, web pages
    - Different, distributed staffs
    - Licensed content, not ownership
  - No more ‘published version’
  - Fewer humans in the archives
  - Revenue from archives
  - Dwindling motivation to make microfilm
Tomorrow’s newspaper tonight

• All adds up to:
  – Failure to capture certain types of content
  – Fewer checks and balances in data validation -- library and archives ‘best practices’
  – Indexing for subject access gives way to tagging for web placement and targeted advertising content
Tomorrow’s newspaper tonight

• All adds up to...
  – Proliferation of problematic formats in one-way databases
  – Loss of experienced librarians and archivists
  – Abandoning the most reliable method of secure long-term storage: Microfilm
  – A digital preservation disaster
News archives survey

• InterPARES digital preservation project
  – 2005-06 through News Division of SLA
  – 81 news libraries of all sizes and resources
  – Looked for emerging best practices in digital archives preservation
  – Growing awareness of threat to historic archives
News archives survey

• Have you lost anything during migration or upgrade? Examples:
  – 20% of stories and photos during migration
  – Entire photo archive
  – All the subject index terms for 1987
  – All the punctuation in text
  – All the photo metadata
  – Some number of JPEGs corrupted
News archives survey

• Have you lost anything during migration or upgrade? Examples:
  – We think so, but we don’t know.
News archives survey

• Other takeaways
  – No standards for metadata
  – Few limits on ingesting unsustainable formats: archive it, figure it out later
  – Few on staff or in IT are knowledgeable about digital preservation issues
    • Who’s responsible?
    • No vendors yet filling the void
  – Dwindling resources
It’s not all bad news

- Vendor interest in commercial systems
  - Sun and Elektrofilm in digital movie preservation venture
  - Issue with definition of ‘preservation’
  - Economics are still uncertain
- Sustaining content of unknown value
It’s not all bad news

- Computer output microfilm (COM)
  - Print page PDFs directly to microfilm
  - Color microfilm now a reality
  - Good for 300-plus years, properly stored
  - Continuous tone film designed for photography
  - Scan it again, scan it later
  - Film as a ‘digital preservation’ medium
It’s not all bad news

• Academic and government models emerging for long-term preservation
  – Institutional repositories
  – ‘Dark archives’ for copyrighted material
  – TRAC (trusted repository audit and certification) was developed in part using Lexis-Nexis news databases as a model
Celebrate the challenge

Born-digital pages are more fragile than acidic newsprint, and our best chance for assuring future access is still microfilm -- and will be for the foreseeable future.
From the archives

mccargar
@mac.com

Victoria McCargar

California Newspapers in the Digital Age