



AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE FOR THE CONSERVATION OF CULTURAL
MATERIAL INC.

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Abstract

Title:

Digital preservation and loss prevention. Is it possible to achieve the miracle of preserving the intangible?

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Abstract:

Recently, when faced with the incredible heartache of losing a family heirloom, I came to ponder questions about loss prevention and preservation generally. The situation had me questioning assumptions regarding loss prevention and preservation in terms of permanence. The pondering narrowed to the digital context. Applied similarly how do we limit, prevent or eradicate loss in the digital realm? Can it be prevented or merely delayed, off-set? I naturally concluded that loss, not least for the emotional and psychological effects, has serious consequences and implications. Access provides meaning and it allows us to look back to look forward.

Personal or not we are never just dealing in isolation with the physical loss (object or digital) alone. There is a reason for the somewhat emotive language used around loss and loss prevention. The burden and consequence of severed connection are what loss leaves behind. Not forgetting the guilt that accompanies the intellectual ramifications of *total loss*. Securing the *stuff* of memory, accomplishment and history equals tangibility for us.

Various factors affect digital longevity. Digital viability has multiple interdependencies, intangibility being just one. A negative *agent of change* to any one of those dependencies can equate to total loss. Digital collections are uniquely vulnerable to change affecting authenticity, and this demands a holistic approach including a digital “life-cycle” plan that recognises digital life expectancy is tenuous and fragile.

Brief Biography of the Author:

I am an artist who has come to have a slightly technical career at MV, partly accidentally, partly on purpose. I constantly wish I was three people, one to help manage the two that constantly assert a sense of dual duty and purpose for existence. Why I see the art practice and museum career paths as dual duties is too obvious a story to tell, one steeped in

establishing personal meaning and identity that most will recognise in themselves. I do believe creative *multiple personalities* are complimentary traits for a museum (GLAM sector) worker. The museum has been kind and patient with me, providing skills and an education I could never have afforded, nor ever have hoped to acquire in any conventional way. I live with my artist partner in Melbourne's north.

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