

Digitization Is Not the Same Thing as Digital Preservation.

The terms digital preservation and digitization are used synonymously in and out of the preservation community. According to Conway (2010), for as much as they both play integral roles in and are part of the standards for preservation in libraries, archives, and other institutions, the terms are often confused and misused. The purpose of this article is to enlighten the reader on the correct use of the terms and to show that digitization is not the same process or defined the same as digital preservation.

Defining the Issue.

The concept of digitization emerged as the need to continue the accessibility to fragile documents weighed against the need to preserve them. In order to preserve the information and simultaneously have them available, microfilming became an accepted preservation practice until digitization became recognized as a readily available form of access. As digitization emerged as a form of preservation people began to confuse digitization with digital preservation (ALA, 2008). The Association for Library Collections and Technical Services Preservation and Reformatting Section, Working Group on Defining Digital Preservation at the American Library Association's Annual Conference in 2007 defined digital preservation as, "... policies, strategies and actions to ensure access to reformatted and born digital content regardless of the challenges of media failure and technological change. The goal of digital preservation is the accurate rendering of authenticated content over time" (American Library Association, 2008). Digitization is defined in *The Whole Digital Library Handbook*, as a form of

reformatting analogue information into a digital resource and storing that information as digital information (Kresh,2007).

To the point

There used to be a quote on the wall of a computer repair shop that said something like digital lasts forever, or five years whatever comes first. The quote was funny and in many ways indicative of the difference between digitization and digital preservation. The disparity in those two definitions from one organization to another lends to the confusion. Understanding the need for the preservation of legal documents in both analog and digital formats, the legal preservation community's concern for the subject gave way to the formation of the Legal Information Preservation Alliance (LIPA) in 2010 and a debate on the subject between archivists and librarians in the legal field at a 2015 William and Mary Law School Conference on Law Repositories Shaping the Future. The outcome of the debate resulted in the following opinion on the subject "...while digitization can be, and often is, an important component of preservation, it isn't always the answer nor is it the final step in the process" (LIPA, 2015). The opinion espoused by LIPA that digitization is essentially the same action as preservation was not shared by experts within the legal archival community. As a response to that debate and the resulting opinion, Tim Knight Associate Librarian and Head of Technical Services, Osgoode Hall Law School Library in Canada, opined on Canada's online legal magazine, SLAW, "For me, preservation is more than just the act of digitizing a resource, although it's definitely a start" (LIPA, 2015).

Conway (2010) takes this delineation a step further into the gray area between digitization and digital preservation, while simultaneously acknowledging there currently exists a distinction between the two actions. In his work “Preservation in the Age of Google”, he acknowledges, “the recognition of digitization as a preservation strategy is a relatively new and still-controversial concept within the cultural heritage community, which has generally viewed digitization activities as a form of copying for easier and broader access.”

Peter Zhou of the University of California, Berkley, in a post on the Digital Preservation Coalition website, writes he frequently encounters “academic leaders, librarians, and information specialists working under the misconception” that digitization is the same as digital preservation (Zhou, 2017). In his blog, Zhou states, “digital conversion makes content digital, but it cannot and will not guarantee that the digitized content can or will be preserved for an unspecified period to come, since the new format may become old, obsolete, or unusable in a matter of a few years—and then there are the problems of format reconciliation, checksum, error correction, data storage, and data migration, all of which are critical components of a robust digital preservation operation, whereas by simply storing the digital content and doing nothing else, one will miss all those vital steps.” (Zhou,2017). The Library of Congress’ blog Signal contains a 2011 entry, “Digitization is Different than Digital Preservation: Help Prevent Digital Orphans!” in which the author states, “while scanning can be a prelude to digital preservation, the two are distinct.” (Knight, 2015). The post continues by explaining the digitization process is a one-time process or an “action, fixed in time” where digital preservation is continuous or “involves active management over time”

While digitization and digital preservation are both actions involving hardware and software, digitization takes the physical or analogue record and through a series of processes creates a rendering of that object in digital form; the survival of digitized objects depends on effective digital preservation (Galloway, 2009). The act of digitization requires an organization to utilize hardware and software applications to transfer analog information in a digital form. Galloway (2009) states at the heart of digital preservation is the ability to create a digital object (digitization) and make it available in the future regardless of changes or shifts in software and hardware generations and upgrades (preservation).

What this means in the archival world.

Zhou clarifies the ambiguity existing between digitization and digital preservation as, “storing digital content is not the same as preserving digital content” storing digital content is a form of changing the format of an object with little or no assurance of that digital content will remain accessible in the future (Zhou,2017). He further states the only way to ensure that the future of that digital content is for there to be an understanding of the difference between digitization and digital preservation. The American Library Association makes the point that one defines usability and the other accessibility. To paraphrase the American Library Association, digitization is a proactive action resulting in the need for organizations to invest in digital preservation.

Sources

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