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Review of Digital Preservation And Metadata: History, Theory, Practice

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DIGITAL PRESERVATION AND METADATA: HISTORY, THEORY, PRACTICE. Susan S. Lazinger (with an annotated list of electronic social science data archives and cultural heritage digitization projects and centers by Helen R. Tibbo). *Libraries Unlimited: Englewood, CO 2001, 359 pp., ISBN 1-56308-777-4.*

As libraries become firmly anchored in the digital environment, it is essential that we all understand how this new technology interacts with, and in many cases replaces, traditional print and paper technology that has kept us afloat for centuries. Many of us think we are familiar with electronic information—after all, we see it on our computer screens day after day. We access emails that we have recently received and saved and we frequently refer to memos, reports, and letters that we have written in the recent past. Few of us go back and try to retrieve materials that we saved in WordStar or in other obsolete computer software systems. And it is a good thing as retrieval of such material is difficult, if not impossible. So what does this mean for librarians purchasing electronic data? It means that every librarian should be asking how long will users be able to access the electronic data that I am purchasing today? And, if not indefinitely, why not? What has been done, what can be done, and what should be done to preserve electronic data? If these are issues that you are dealing with, interested in, or concerned about, this book is for you.

Lazinger has attempted to answer these relatively new questions with a thoroughly documented work that explores five serious questions about digital information. These five fundamental questions, which form the first five chapters of this book, are:

- Why is Digital Preservation an Issue?

- What Electronic Data Should Be Preserved?

- Who Should Be Responsible for Digital Preservation?

- How Can Electronic Publications Be Preserved?

- How Much Will It Cost?

Since these questions are addressing a technology that is, for all practical purposes, less that 30 years old, it is impossible to do much more than seek out what the best minds have had to say on each of these issues. Lazinger has done this and the text is replete with many lengthy quotations. Additionally, every new term that has been developed or applied to this new technology such as metadata and fixity, or phrases such as digital tablets, digital time-stamping, or digital signatures is defined or described.

Out of the thinking of the best minds attuned to these issues, solutions in the forms of models, formats, and standards have arisen, and these topics are covered in the two chapters that comprise Part II of this work, "Models, Formats, and Standards." Once again, this section is heavily documented.

The final section of this book is entitled, "Selected Electronic Data Archives" and was complied by Professor Helen Tibbo of the University of North Carolina. It is composed of two chapters. Each chapter is a basically a list of all of the organizations that have developed or maintain an electronic archive. Chapter 8 covers such organizations in the United States and chapter 9 covers international digital cultural heritage centers, sites, and electronic data archives.

This final chapter is followed by a 27-page bibliography and an impressive 24-page detailed index.

This book is a must for all library and information science libraries, for all institutions with programs in computer science, and for all librarians who have to make the choice of purchasing digital rather than print. Even if it is not clear whether or not digital materials will be with us for a significant period of time, at least the librarian can be informed concerning her

choices. And, while work will have continued since this volume was published, all subsequent

research will be built upon the foundations so ably documented in this volume.

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