

CASE STUDY: DORSET HISTORY CENTRE

January 2015

ABSTRACT

This case study covers the Dorset History Centre, a local government archive service, and its use of Preservica Cloud Edition - a cloud-based digital preservation service. It explains the organisational context of the archive, the nature of its digital preservation requirements and approaches, its two year pilot project using Preservica Cloud Edition, the archive's technical infrastructure, and the business case and funding for the pilot. It concludes with the key lessons they have learnt and future plans.

ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT

Dorset History Centre is the home of the Joint Archives Service for Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole. The archive service acquires, preserves and provides access to records from across the three authority areas and is jointly funded by them on a pro rata to population basis. It was one of very few joint services to survive local government reorganisation. The service is hosted by Dorset County Council. The governing body, the Joint Archives Advisory Board, is made up of elected members from each authority, sets the budget and agrees service priorities. As the budget is jointly funded and set annually there is a degree of uncertainty for the service and for forward planning. In recent years there has been significant financial austerity across local government that has affected funding for the archive and other departments.

Digital preservation was identified in 2011 via the service plan as a priority for the Joint Archives Service. Creating and appointing to a dedicated post for this function was critical, and this was achieved in September 2012 from within existing resources. To fully explore the options available to the JAS, the digital preservation officer attended several training events, such as the Digital Preservation Training Programme and a SPRUCE project mash-up. The service has subsequently been working to generate sufficient interest and understanding of digital preservation within the IT and information governance sections of Dorset County Council to get support for the funding of a year's pilot project using the Preservica Cloud Edition service.

There has been significant digitisation work undertaken in partnership with ancestry.com. The first phase of Ancestry.com work started in 2010 with about 500,000 digital images being made available online. The popularity of this project has emphasised the need for the service to remain relevant to users in a digital environment, and they are keen to do more as resources allow. The archive received hard drives with copies of the images from Ancestry.com which they are keen to keep accessible and usable for when the 15-year exclusive contract with Ancestry.com expires. Independent of this, there has also been some digitisation of film and sound archive material.

There are several projects underway or upcoming with a significant digitisation and/or oral history recording element. The resulting files need to remain accessible to satisfy grant fund providers and maximise the investment in these projects.

DIGITAL PRESERVATION

Significance

Digital preservation is a strategic priority for the service – they see it as both a necessary thing in terms of safeguarding access to digital data, but also in terms of the raison d'être of the service which applies to all records, regardless of format. If they don't engage with digital preservation, eventually someone else will and the archive service will become a time capsule for paper and parchment only.

The service does not see this changing significantly at all over the next three years. The likelihood is that the volume of both digitised and born digital material will increase and therefore remain of major importance.

Current approaches

The service has started a two year-long pilot with Preservica Cloud Edition. Prior to this they had not been actively managing their digital content. The pilot is an opportunity to manage the digital content they have as well as promote the service; identify and build relationships with potential depositors; and establish a strategy for the sustainability of digital preservation in the longer-term. They will need to retain both digitised and born-digital material and provide access to it in the long-term.

How they would want this to change over the next 3 years

Digital preservation needs to be embedded as business as usual. They are particularly interested in ways to generate income from digital preservation, by charging for it as a service or through advertising/sponsorship. They would like to see all three local authority funders supporting their digital preservation work. The service is also considering if there is scope for revenue from preservation of district and borough planning records or from private enterprises if they can provide a high-quality preservation service that is attractive to them. The service is interested in potential charging models and any existing examples of this. The Preservica Digital Value at Risk calculator is a useful tool for them, and they hope to work with Preservica to develop something similar for possible charging models.

Range of content types and volumes of digital material

They are currently dealing with a backlog of digital data that has arrived on a variety of storage media, including some audiovisual material. This has yet to be processed or analysed so the nature and volume of the content is currently unknown.

They expect the volume of digital material coming into the archive over the next three years to increase as they are able to demonstrate to depositors that they can look after it.

As of January 2015 the amount of digital material processed is over 1TB, including sound, audio-visual and text based files. This is mostly incoming material; the backlog is yet to be addressed.

DHC is keen to better understand the implication of acquiring and managing locally-generated born-digital Public Records. Clearly, this role will further enhance and modernise the statutory basis on which the service undertakes this work. However, there will be a cost implication which needs to be analysed and clarified.

CLOUD STORAGE FOR DIGITAL PRESERVATION

Preservica pilot project

A one year pilot project with Preservica Cloud Edition was awarded £17,000 by Dorset County Council in August 2013. This funding has been extended for another year (until March 2016) to allow further evaluation and development. The county council is thus funding this area of work in what is in all other respects, a joint service.

The early adopter benefits offered by Preservica made early start attractive but it has taken several months to get started. The Dorset pilot started on 01 January 2014 with a day's training at beginning and some consultancy time from Preservica as part of the early adopter package.

In terms of evaluation, it was ultimately a choice between a modular open-source system and an out of the box solution. Before the digital preservation officer was in post, the County Archivist attended a meeting of the SE Archives Digital Preservation Group – it looked at work in the London School of Economics, a presentation on Preservica, and Gloucestershire County Council on their local systems for digital preservation. From that and other research, they concluded they needed a supported package as there was neither the technical capacity within the archive service nor the IT resources within Dorset County Council necessary to develop an open-source system. From there they quickly narrowed down options to Ex Libris or Preservica.

The legal issue of location of servers and data was covered pre-procurement. Preservica are using Amazon's Dublin-based servers for Preservica Cloud Edition so its server location is within EU jurisdiction.

Key priorities within the pilot period are:

- Records with statutory protection– identification from local retention schedules and evaluation of possible revenue streams for future service. Areas of particular interest will be: adult/children's social care records and Planning – wherever statutory provision exists.

As of January 2015 they have had discussions with several DCC departments and have received some digital deposits as a result. In some cases, it has been more difficult. For example, they have concluded that, due to the current record keeping practice in the planning department it is not feasible to pursue acquiring planning applications electronically at this time. The main issues are the lack of consistency in the current approach to information management; and the difficulty in determining the point of transfer of records to the archive as files tend to stay open for a long time. Whilst open, more documents are often added and some may be amended. Another team want to wait to transfer records electronically until SharePoint is implemented in order to handle all the changes in their processes at the same time.

Security has been a major concern for departments with sensitive records. The Amazon Web Services S3 solution on which Preservica is based has been certified on the government Cloud Store to Business Impact Level (BIL) 2. DCC IT has completed a risk assessment and suggested mitigating controls on the Preservica (Cloud Edition) system. The service is then suitable for the storage and processing of DCC Official information at BIL1 or BIL 2, with the caveat that the information owner must accept the small residual risks left after suggested controls are implemented.

Discussions with Bournemouth Borough Council and the Borough of Poole regarding digital preservation have been initiated and meetings set up with representatives from both.

- Understanding the processes and complexities of digital preservation. Developing a detailed understanding of how Preservica Cloud Edition works and what else they need to do in terms of digital preservation policy and procedures.

As of January 2015 this is ongoing. A draft digital preservation policy has been written.

- Proving benefits – especially potential cost savings and Data Protection / Freedom of Information implications for local authorities. Proving it is worthwhile and how to extend it. Needs to be long-term but how to embed it and fund it?

As of January 2015 this is ongoing. The pilot extension until March 2016 has been agreed to give them more time to explore these issues.

- Developing access – via CALM (which they are migrating to from Adlib) and interoperability to ensure a single point of access and description for digital data. Access to the digital records themselves will be offered through an end user access module developed by Preservica.

The installation of Calm took considerably longer than estimated. The work to integrate Preservica and Calm is now almost complete. Adoption of Preservica's Universal Access module is scheduled for later this year.

- Working with records management colleagues to ensure that the proposed acquisition of SharePoint later in 2014 complements Preservica Cloud Edition and can be used in conjunction with it.

As of January 2015 this is ongoing. Preservica and RecordPoint (a records management functionality enhancement for SharePoint) are in early discussion about integration. SharePoint is still in the design and planning phase for DCC.

TECHNICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Main software systems used for electronic content management, preservation and access services

The County Council will soon be introducing SharePoint to manage current electronic information, using RecordPoint to enhance the records management functionality. Calm will be used to catalogue all archival collections regardless of format and public access to the catalogue is available online. Preservica Cloud Edition is used to manage material worthy of permanent preservation, and will provide public access via the web in the near future.

BUSINESS CASE AND FUNDING

Main issues in their business case for cloud storage for digital preservation

- Legal/compliance – i.e. the question of ‘do we have to do this?’ is now constantly raised as authorities look for ways of reducing their costs. Used business analyst from IT to help internal bid to Dorset for pilot.
- How is this going to help the authority either save money or avoid reputational damage? The business case emphasised the financial, reputational and operational risks associated with the loss or mismanagement of data. Internal discussions relating to the corporate risk register are likely to see information loss and potential means for mitigating that risk attain a higher level of significance.
- Maintaining the corporate memory beyond the life of paper records (i.e. now) and how digital preservation is key to facilitating this.
- Archive service taking the initiative was important – digital preservation is a continuation of the archives’ core function simply in a different way. It is a challenge for the future role and justifying the existence of the archive.
- They found it difficult to get ‘examples of digital preservation gone wrong’ from the wider community that can illustrate the risks on an organisational scale. If organisations are reluctant to publicise them, perhaps anonymised examples could be shared?
- The digital preservation officer had attended the SPRUCE project mash-up, which included workshops looking at business cases, and found it useful in testing the elevator pitch for the proposed pilot, etc. Sharing ideas and experiences provided re-assurance they were on the right lines, but they felt some arguments made by the Higher Education sector were less relevant in a local authority context.

KEY LESSONS THEY HAVE LEARNT

- Digital preservation as a concept is a very difficult one for some people to grasp and there should be no assumptions made about the level of information or comprehension people will have about the subject. Advocacy is needed for all stakeholders, tailored to specific needs and understanding. For example councillors on the joint advisory board easily understood and recognised reputational risk as an issue. In terms of the council officers, the archive had a savvy business analyst working on the business case and that made it much easier to communicate in a language that made sense to the decision makers. Ditto their immediate line manager understood the issues and was supportive.
- Using a cloud service, the project is reliant on revenue funding – the funding usually allocated for projects through Dorset County Council is capital – this caused a tension with the accountancy ‘view’ (based on The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) rules) of how the money was to be spent, although this has now been resolved. The issue was around the technical coding of what is revenue/capital council expenditure – they will not own servers, etc. in the pilot.
- Cloud services are often regarded with some suspicion within local government. They had one conversation with a procurement officer who felt local authorities were investing in accrual of revenue cost if they used cloud services. Also there are legal and security concerns remaining around remote storage. There were concerns raised by the corporate information manager that Preservica Cloud Edition did not have sufficiently high security (Business Impact Level 3) rating to handle sensitive (e.g. social care) records and that this should therefore remain a separate issue.
- There are few models to turn to for advice/guidance – e.g. on developing a charging mechanism for potential users of the Cloud based service.
- Procurement through G-Cloud in general terms was easy – no external competition needed and they could just select relevant supplier. Form filling needed was very easy and quick to complete.

- Support from IT business analyst was really important – acted as ‘interpreter’ for them with IT and procurement colleagues.
- When dealing with council departments persistence is needed to gather and maintain momentum.

FUTURE PLANS

The two year pilot project with Preservica Cloud Edition will conclude in March 2016. The archive service aims to eventually embed digital preservation into the service as ‘business as usual’ in a way that is sustainable into the future.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Dorset History Centre: <http://www.dorsetforyou.com/dorsethistorycentre>

Preservica Cloud Edition Service: <http://preservica.com>

Preservica Digital Value at Risk calculator [registration required for access]
<http://preservica.com/resource/digital-value-at-risk-dvar-calculator/>

SPRUCE Project Digital Preservation Business Case Toolkit
http://wiki.dpconline.org/index.php?title=Digital_Preservation_Business_Case_Toolkit

HMG IA Standard No. 1 – Technical Risk Assessment HMG IA Standard No. 1 –
Technical Risk Assessment
http://www.cesg.gov.uk/publications/Documents/is1_risk_assessment.pdf