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The blog of SAA's Electronic Records Section

Developing a Citizen Archive

📅 February 1, 2017February 1, 2017   👤 bloggERS! Editors
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This post is the first post in our series on international perspectives on digital preservation (https://saaers.wordpress.com/tag/international-perspectives-blog-series/).

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At Digitalia (http://www.xamk.fi/en/research-and-development/digitalia-research-center-digital-information-management/)—the Research and Development Center on Digital Information Management at the South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences—we believe that there is a strong need for a digital preservation service that would give ordinary citizens the right to decide what to do with their personal information. Currently, Finnish citizens must rely upon unsatisfactory solutions to preserve their valuable information for future generations, such as cloud storage (with dubious terms and conditions), or unreliable portable USB drives or optical media. Cloud storage services especially have surged in popularity in recent years, but these services are not OAIS-compliant, have no support for metadata schema such as METS and PREMIS, and make no guarantee that the data or user-generated metadata uploaded will remain safe or searchable. We are developing the Citizen Archive in response to these concerns.

Individuals are increasingly interested in documenting their personal lives and its most valuable artifacts. A personal archive is not only for information storage and retrieval. It represents other important values, such as legacy building, protecting against loss of important personal data, and constructing personal identity (Kaye et al., 2006 (http://alumni.media.mit.edu/~jofish/writing/tohaveandtohold.pdf)). It may also turn into a valuable source of information for researchers and businesses.

At the same time, the amount of digital information produced by the average citizen has increased exponentially. Formats traditionally found in personal archives range from print documents and letters to photographs and analog videos. In contrast, digital media allows everyone to share the aspects of their life story easily, and these may consist of born-digital photos, digital videos, and conversations captured in email or on social media.

In an earlier project, South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences developed Open Source Archive (OSA, http://osa.mamk.fi (http://osa.mamk.fi/)), a service-oriented web-based archive platform. OSA has since been applied by civil sector organizations and non-profit associations, and is now being modified to accommodate personal archives.

For example, one important aspect of modern family heritage is digital interaction between family members. So far, Digitalia has focused mainly on email. We have developed a workflow to convert Outlook data structure files (.pst or .ost) into validated PDF/A-3b files with embedded original attachments and metadata. While *.pst* or *.ost* files are not easily transferrable or accessible long-term, PDF/A files are device-independent, and an accepted format for permanent preservation.

The complete processing time is about eight minutes for a one gigabyte .pst file. In the future, this functionality will be extended to cover email retrieved from Gmail, Hotmail, AOL Mail and other commonly used email providers.

Overcoming Social, Technical, and Legal Challenges

The long-term storage and maintenance of personal digital information brings social, technical, and legal challenges. Digitalia is collaborating with leading Finnish specialists in information law and information security. The project is in its early phases. We are developing this platform together with our users, aiming at continuous improvement and a better user experience. We are currently operating through EU research funding. Later, the funding and cost model for the Citizen Archive will be developed together with project partners.

Digitalia is trying to help create a future where people are able to manage their personal information with easy-to-use and low-cost tools. We believe a digital preservation service for ordinary citizens represents a sure step in this direction.

More info about Digitalia: http://www.xamk.fi/en/research-and-development/digitalia-research-center-digital-information-management/ (http://www.xamk.fi/en/research-and-development/digitalia-research-center-digital-information-management/)

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