FREEZE!

A manifesto for safeguarding and preserving born-digital heritage

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Aims.

Finding ways to preserve born-digital heritage has become a matter of urgency and growing concern. Websites, games and interactive documentaries each bring specific challenges that need to be addressed. It takes three to tango: Ensuring that our digital lives and digital creativity are not lost to future generations requires a joint effort by the principal players: creators, heritage professionals and policy makers. This manifesto lays out the actions they need to take today to safeguard born-digital heritage.

Creators.

Digital products are at risk of being lost from the moment they are created. Creators are therefore part of the preservation process - whether by writing code, editing digital content or by creating some other form of digital expression. We encourage creators as follows:
• Invest time to describe your work carefully, whatever platform you use to store and manage your work. Provide at least a minimal set of metadata (who, what, where, when). Always include versioning data and information about the rights status of the work.
• Document your work as copiously as possible. Documentation enables future users to understand and reuse your work more easily. Describe the technical specifications of your work, for example the hardware and software used to create the work.
• If possible, assign open licenses (such as Creative Commons) to your work. This enables content to be reused. Reuse will help to ensure the longevity of your work.
• Where possible, use open-source software and open-source hardware. Your work will withstand the test of time better, since open means: independent of proprietary technology and vendor lock-in, and transparent availability of the source code and building blocks of your work.

Heritage Professionals.

Digital material presents several challenges for heritage professionals. For instance, the sheer amount of material created, dispersed among diverse platforms, hardware and domains makes selection a daunting task. There is little standardization of file formats and environments that supports these. Norms for describing and managing this complexity are inadequately developed. The tasks involved in collecting, preserving and making digital materials accessible fall into three categories. We encourage heritage professionals as follows:

Policy
• Identify vulnerable digital heritage in your area of activity and find out which forms of digital heritage your organisation develops, manages or intends to manage (in line with collection policy plans). Create a convergent digital landscape by harmonising collection policies with other institutions. To ensure success, avoid overlaps and gaps in the combined collections.
• Develop policies for acquiring and keeping born-digital material accessible sustainably. Use existing models, as described in the 'DIY Handbook of Web Archaeology'.
• Obtain legal advice regarding storage and reuse. Act responsibly when using, managing and making personal data or information accessible.

Implementation:
• Where possible, cooperate with (fellow) institutions and industrial partners to find collective solutions. Choose robust –preferably open - technical infrastructures and operating systems.
• Assume that your current technology will need to be updated regularly. So prepare your exit strategy: can you move data from system A to system B easily?
• Use well-documented, open standards, e.g. for storage formats and exchange protocols. Non-dependence on suppliers ensures your archive material remains interchangeable in the future.
• Agree clear guidelines for delivery of acquired and transferred born-digital material: when, why and under what terms. Outline the rights and obligations before and after material is transferred. If accessibility is an objective, organise this when the acquisition is realised: lay down terms for accessing the collections.
• Ensure copious metadata records are kept of digital objects so that the context in which these were created is clear for future users. E.g. record the hardware and software environment in which objects function. Document data in the form of descriptions, photos, screenshots, screencasts, videos etc, and establish conservation procedures.
• Ensure collections can be used and reused, that digital objects can be found, accessed, interoperated, reused and stored in a sustainable manner. Use and reuse by a large group of users increases awareness of the importance and need for preservation.

Knowledge sharing:
• Exploit the power of the community. Introduce your team to the original creators, inventors and users. Organise meetings to share expertise.
• Keep track of developments in amateur communities involved with digital works. Much can be learned from bottom-up initiatives by amateurs who keep older digital cultures alive.
• Invest in your co-workers' increasing expertise and keep track of developments by following blogs, seminars and participating in domestic and international expert communities, such as NDE (Digital Heritage Network Netherlands) or iPRES.

• New born-digital products require new instruments and new research queries. To keep pace with rapid changes in technology, be prepared for new ways of working and new ways of cooperating.

Policy makers.

You hold the key to creating a sustainable policy that ensures sustainable digital heritage. We encourage policy makers to do the following:
• Stimulate cross-domain collaboration and use of collaborative instruments. Value hands-on expertise. Encourage the experts who love tracking down bit rot, annotating ancient code and building emulators. Put them in a position to share their knowledge and obtain recognition for their contribution.
• Bring the need to develop sustainability policy and preservation policy to the attention of institutions.
• Stimulate the emergence and use of open and collective services to ensure that as many heritage institutions in the Netherlands as possible will be able to guarantee long-term access to the digital collections they manage. Encourage collaboration within the Digital Heritage Network, based on the National Strategy for Digital Heritage.
• Encourage copyright reform to facilitate the preservation, availability and reuse of born-digital heritage.

Invitation

There are many ways to advance the aims outlined here. We are the steering committee of the DDS project, realised in 2016 and 2017 with support from Mondriaan Fund, National Coalition Digital Preservation, Digital Heritage Network, Prince Bernhard Culture Fund, Creative Industries Fund NL. We welcome your feedback regarding this version of our manifesto and are keen to learn about other activities designed to pursue these goals. We encourage others to join us to help further the overarching objective of preserving born-digital heritage.

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