

Book Reviews

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The Theory and Craft of Digital Preservation. By Trevor Owens. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018. 226 p. \$34.95 softcover (ISBN: 9781421426976)

Digital preservation is a challenging topic. The digital world evolves so quickly that it is hard to keep up with all the new developments, or understand the shelf life of various digital media because it has been changing exponentially fast.

In the book *The Theory and Craft of Digital Preservation*, Owens tries to uncover the facts and provide support and ideas to anyone impacted by digital preservation. He gives the reader a little background by describing what constitutes digital media and how digital preservation is being accomplished in the preservation world. Owens states that this book is a “guidebook.” It is not step-by-step instructions on how to perform digital preservation, nor is he illustrating the correct method to preserve a particular type of media. It provides the reader with an overview of the topic and insider knowledge to make more informed decisions about digital preservation. Owens notes three different frames for thinking about preservation: artifactual, informational, and folkloric. Each one of these frames shows the multiple ways of thinking about preservation. Preservation does not have a clear-cut definition, and Owens is able to articulate this idea in each chapter.

A theme that is present throughout the book is the idea of not being discouraged if we do not have all the answers about digital preservation. The book raises the point that new media is continually being created and new technology can potentially give us those answers we seek. For anyone that touches some aspect of digital preservation, this reminder provides hope.

Owens also raises the idea of collaboration, especially with computer science. This field can be valuable in trying to devise solutions surrounding digital preservation, especially since computer science could be the initial root of the media. Forming this type of partnership may help create ideas that would not have been otherwise considered. Sometimes solutions can be found when input is sought from individuals that are further from the problem: “It is not about universal solutions. It is about crafting the right approach for a given preservation context” (73). The author also emphasizes that each form of media may need a different digital preservation process. Just like humans and learning styles, each type of media needs to be handled uniquely.

Owens makes a good point that “preservation is an

active process” (75). As preservationists, we cannot become complacent. Just because we have updated a digital format of a particular object does not mean we are finished. As Owens says, we have to be continually active in trying to preserve each item as best as we know how, with the technology and resources available. Preventative maintenance is key, and planning for potential risks is a good idea. Depending on the size of an institution, what can be done to preserve digital media can vary. For example, larger institutions may have more available staff assigned to devote their time in digital preservation, whereas a smaller institution may not. Each individual institution must decide how much preservation they can provide, how little preservation that is needed to maintain a collection, and how in-depth each collection needs to be preserved. Creating a statement of preservation intent for each collection is how an institution can show the expectations for their preservation process and the guidelines that they follow.

Deciding on what gets preserved is also an important topic. The importance, however, is subjective. One person may think preserving a certain item is the most important, while another person may feel something else is more important. Owens summed this idea by saying, “It is important to remember that, for the most part, people now and in the future are less interested in things themselves than in what things signify” (90).

This book is not just for experts. Owens uses real-life examples to put the hard-to-truly-pin-down-topic into a more tangible form for even a lay person to grasp. Some of his examples include preserving butterflies, World of Warcraft, floppy disks of the tape recordings of Carl Sagan, and floppy disks from Jonathan Larson, the creator of RENT. With each example, he demonstrates each point in an informal and relatable way for an audience from any type of background. Overall, the book does a good job defining digital preservation and covering a basic introduction to the world of digital preservation. Owens shows his love of digital preservation and conveys an in-depth knowledge that he is willing to share with the rest of the community. —Katherine E. Jones (katherine.jones@oswego.edu), State University of New York at Oswego