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**apac**

Association of  
Performing Arts  
Collections

## **Making the case:**

National Theatre Digital Preservation  
Case Study

Prepared by APAC Digital Preservation  
Working Group

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# WHO DO YOU NEED TO SPEAK TO IN YOUR ORGANISATION?

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The first person we needed to get on side for digital preservation was the Director of Learning, to whom the Head of Archive reports. This was a matter of explaining the situation in the Archive meticulously, drawing out workflows and diagrams and helping them to understand what was at stake if we did not act to preserve our assets. Although they do not come from an archival background, they would be key to explaining the importance of this project to the rest of senior management and driving the case forward in a pincer movement with the archive team so it was important that I gave them the confidence and vocabulary to present the case to their peers.

It was equally important to bring on board the Director of IT and any IT staff I could speak to. We have had several directors of IT in the years that it has taken for this project to get off the ground and they have all engaged with this project to different degrees. The most useful thing I did was to invite them along to APAC meetings where we were visiting institutions such as the Houses of Parliament or The National Archives so that they could ask the technical questions they had and could be exposed to best practice in the sector. It was key to involve IT at an early stage because we needed to ensure that the project had their buy-in and support as we would not be able to implement a solution without them.

# KNOWING WHAT YOU HAVE AND WHERE IT IS

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A fundamental issue with getting this project off the ground was knowing what we had and where it was. IT colleagues were not able to give us this information so we created a digital asset register. This involved us contacting every department within the NT to ask them to fill in the form either on their own or with us in a meeting. This was time consuming but it gave us a good sense of where digital files were being created, their volume, formats and accrual rate. This in turn helped us to assign risk levels to the assets ranging from 'low' if they were word documents that were well file-named and on a server that was backed up to 'high' if they were less common formats being held on external hard-drives and commercially valuable.

One of the most difficult things about creating this register was estimating future accrual rate but this is also the most useful piece of work to do as it provides you with a sense of the quantity of storage that you will be looking for year on year.

# UNDERSTANDING THE BENEFITS OF DIGITAL PRESERVATION

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Understanding how digital preservation activities can specifically benefit your organisation will help you when it comes to attracting support and funding for your project. For the National Theatre, the commercial benefit of preserving the Archive's digital content was clear. The screening of recorded theatrical productions in cinemas by NT Live relies on authentic and reliable digital files. If NT Live wish to re-screen a previous transmission on an anniversary for example, then it is crucial the original digital files can be accessed and re-used. This became readily apparent during 2020 when the theatre was unable to welcome physical audiences and instead had to pivot to streaming content online.

The NT Archive had built a good relationship with the NT Live department prior to our DP project, regularly receiving deposits of material. We were able to demonstrate how good archival practice was essential to the continued ability of NT Live to function successfully. Risk of the loss of this content was also emphasised and how any loss of material would negatively affect the NT brand. We demonstrated how implementing a proper digital preservation solution could reduce costs by reducing reliance on external hard drives and ensuring files would continue to remain accessible and stored in one location.

We made use of free, easy-to-use benchmarking tools to chart our progress. These included the National Digital Stewardship Alliance's levels of preservation and the Digital Preservation Coalition's 'Rapid Assessment Model'. Both of these tools enable organisations to identify capabilities at a given moment and how to progress. These tools are also a helpful reminder that digital preservation is a continual process, rather than a one-off achievement.

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# Elevator Pitch

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The NT Archive collections cover all aspects of the NT from board papers to how we get productions on stage. There are many challenges with the digital material, which is now the main sort of record the Archive receives: there is a range of formats used by various departments; the Archive and IT do not know where all of the digital assets are and how they are stored; not everything that needs to be digitally preserved is in the Archive and so the archival collections are not comprehensive; and there is an ever increasing volume of content.

We need to create a digital asset register to gain intellectual control over digital assets, their location, vulnerability and value. There needs to be a more holistic approach to managing digital assets across the organisation from file naming to storage solutions. Importantly, we need to invest in a digital preservation solution.

Getting to a place where we are confident in our digital preservation will take years and require us to embrace new software but we can approach it with incremental steps to make the project more achievable and manageable.

This project will be successful when we have met the following objectives: confidence in our solution and workflows; secure digital assets; transparency in our record keeping; business continuity; accessible records; preserved heritage. This is the sole aim of the NT Archive and this access to content supports the NT objective to make theatre available to everyone.

This takes just over 1 minute to speak and we have found it useful for speaking with our management and the Director of IT.

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# WRITING A BUSINESS CASE

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Before we could write a business case for digital preservation, we wrote a request for information (RFI) to be sent to prospective suppliers. An IT project manager helped us throughout this process and her help was invaluable in verbalising this project in a way that senior management would understand. We used The National Archives spreadsheet of suppliers to help us identify which suppliers might suit our requirements.

The RFI was structured as follows:

- Introduction
- Background
- Objectives
- Summary of requirements
- Workflow requirements
- Storage requirements
- IT infrastructure
- Queries
- Timetable
- Other information
- Appendices (Vendor details, Budgetary guides, Requirement Checklist)

The Requirement Checklist appendix was the most important and is where we listed out all of our requirements split into architecture, support and system administration, integration, digital preservation functionality, user set-up for staff, user set-up for researchers and ingest. We then ranked these in terms of how desirable they were.

We received responses from two of the three suppliers we sent this to and then set up demo meetings for them to show us their system and answer questions in person. We ensured that we had a representative from IT and from Digital Media with us when we had these meetings. We also visited or had calls with around 6 users of these suppliers and had frank discussions with them about their experiences and collections. This was invaluable for us in drilling down into what would suit our situation and also provided us with questions we had not considered asking in the demo meetings. After these demos, we were in a position to make a recommendation to our Capital Working Group and it was at this point that we needed to write a business case.

Our business case had the following sections:

- Executive summary
- Background
- Selection process
- Business options (do nothing and then each of the suppliers)
- Timescale
- Return on investment
- Conclusion
- Appendix (ROI document)

This was circulated to the group in advance, I presented it in a meeting and was backed up by a member of IT, who knew the project well and could answer some of the more technical questions. The swaying point for the group was that we went with the supplier which was least bespoke and required the least input from IT even though the initial outlay was more expensive.



# WRITING A DIGITAL PRESERVATION POLICY AND PLAN

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A digital preservation policy and plan are documents that may help you gain traction for your digital preservation project within your own organisation. The policy should be high-level, therefore understandable by management and others from non-archival backgrounds. The plan is more granular and should detail how you are hoping to achieve your aims. The NT digital preservation policy outlines the aims of increased digital preservation capability for the organisation in broad terms:

- Support for future NT business functions
- Increased availability of content on digital platforms such as the NT website and the NT Collection
- Access to our history for everyone in perpetuity
- Stimulation of academic research into the performing arts
- Capture of ever evolving technological advancements
- Greater enjoyment of performing arts for NT audiences and beyond

The policy outlines that the NT will aim to build DP capacity in the following key areas:

- Storage and Geographical Location
  - File Fixity and Data Integrity
  - Information Security
  - Metadata
  - File formats
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The policy also establishes roles and responsibilities for implementation. A glossary of common digital preservation terms was also added to our policy appendix. The NT digital preservation plan meanwhile goes into more detail about how the aims in the policy will be achieved. We included a list of preferred file formats and the results of the NDSA Levels as appendixes to our plan. Both policy and plan are due for regular updates as our digital preservation capability increases.

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Stay tuned for  
***Part 2: Options for Digital Preservation***  
to be published early in 2022.

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