JERSEY
HERITAGE

Preserving your Digital Records

The purpose of the Jersey Archive is to identify, select, collect, manage, preserve and provide access to the Island's records on behalf of the whole community, promoting Jersey's culture, heritage and sense of place, both within its shores and beyond.

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Opening Hours: 9am to 1pm & 2pm to 5pm, Tuesday to Thursday. Open 9am to 1pm on the third Saturday of the month. To book an appointment please phone
or email.

The information in this leaflet is accurate as of October 2020. Please be aware that the Jersey Archive receives new collections on a regular basis and ask staff if you have any queries.

General Information

More and more of our lives are lived using digital technology such as computers, smartphones, and tablets. This means that more and more documents which once would have been created on paper are being created and stored using these types of devices. Documents which you might be creating and storing digitally could include photographs, correspondence and minutes, newsletters, and records of clubs and other voluntary organisations.

If paper documents are properly looked after they can last for hundreds of years without too much effort. Digital documents on the other hand require ongoing maintenance and attention to make sure they stay usable. This can seem like a daunting task. In this leaflet we hope to give you some simple ideas that will help you get started.

Vulnerability of Digital Records

Digital documents are vulnerable to several factors, including: Hardware failure; Hardware and software becoming obsolete; Accidental deletion; Being affected by malicious software such as viruses; Software manufacturers or online services going out of business, being taken over or changing their policies; Losing track of where you have stored things, especially if your documents are spread across different devices, software, websites and online services.

Steps You Can Take to Preserve Your Digital Records

There are some simple steps you can take that will help you take control of preserving your digital records.

Identify – A good first step is to see what you have got and what you would like to preserve. Think about which files you could not live without, which files you could not replace, and which files are important to you, your family or your organisation.

Import – Collect all your files into one place. It's possible that that you have files scattered across various different locations so a good step is to gather them into one place. This is particularly true with things like photographs, which may be spread on phones, digital cameras and various websites and social media services. This will allow you to see exactly what you have. It will also mean that making a backup copy will be easier. It's easier to use a computer to do this if possible, rather than a smartphone or tablet.

Decide – Select what to keep, and weed out unwanted items. What you keep may depend heavily on what you intend to happen to your documents, and what your archive is for.

Organise – Sort your files into a file structure and rename them according to your naming conventions (see separate section on file naming). Document the structure and conventions you are using so they can be easily understood by your future self or someone else. This can be as simple as keeping a 'Readme' text file explaining your naming and file structure conventions and your back up practices.

Export and Store – Your files should now be ready for storage. A popular recommendation for storage of digital documents is the '3-2-1' approach. This means keeping at least 3 copies of your files, on at least 2 different types of media, with 1 kept in a different location. For example, you could set a date every month to copy your digital photos from your computer onto a portable hard drive (second copy, different media), and use an online or 'cloud' storage service to automatically back the photos up (third copy, different location). Another useful term that describes this idea is LOCKSS (Lots Of Copies Keeps Stuff Safe).

Long-term preservation and maintenance – As you can see, digital preservation is not a one-off activity but an ongoing, continual process. In future, you may want to schedule a time to regularly transfer and organise your files to stop them getting out of hand. It's much easier to do this little and often than in one big chunk.
Once you have stored your files, it is important to keep them safe and secure by protecting their integrity. Make sure you maintain your passwords for devices

and / or specific documents, files or folders. Also, keep up to date with your anti-virus software protection and software updates.

Additionally, you could consider creating and regularly checking "checksums" or digital signatures to ensure that your files do not change or become corrupt over time. Checksums can be generated by several different utilities and can be stored with your files. Tools to consider for managing checksums include Hashdeep, Fixity, and DROID.

If your collection is no longer being actively used, you may consider depositing or donating it to the archive. Please contact us for advice on this.

Naming and Organising your Files

File names are more important than you might think. They can help you or others find a relevant document but they can also hinder your understanding of a file's purpose. Developing a plan for naming your files will help you and others understand and navigate what is there more easily. This may seem like an overwhelming task if you have a large backlog but simple things like adding event names or dates at the start of file names, or grouping similar files together in named folders, can have a big impact. Most importantly, be consistent and descriptive when naming your files. It will help to keep a 'Readme' document in .txt format with your files explaining the system you have used in case you or someone else needs to refer back to it in the future.

This is an example of a bad file name: 3b3b359f2844e97586dd0c0bf7.jpg – a long string of letters and numbers which mean nothing to anyone and give you no idea of the contents of the file.

This is a better file name: 20160314-CPR-minutes.docx – it contains the date and a reference to the file contents. It is also reasonably short and doesn't contain any special characters.

Special Characters include # <> @ + % ! & * | {} ? /\ " = @ and blank spaces. They can prevent files from being viewable by a wide variety of programs or operating systems, so try not to use them in your file names.

It is also important not to make your file names too long, as some operating systems will not be able to read them. This can be difficult when you are trying to be descriptive of the file's content, so you will have to

use your imagination! Similarly, if you have too many folders nested inside each other, the 'file path' (the map the computer's operating system will have to follow to retrieve the file when you want to use it) may become too long for the computer to cope with.

If adding dates to a file name, the best date format to use is to put the year first, followed by the month, then the day, separated by dashes, e.g 2018-02-24. This follows the international standard for writing dates, and will help when sorting files into date order.

Advice on which File Formats to use

Jersey Archive accepts files in any format, however the following types of files are preferred for long term preservation. File formats not on this list can be copied as PDF files for easy access.
- Tiffs for master storage and high quality reproduction of image files
- Jpegs for access version of images files
- Microsoft formats
- Pdf/A files
- Txt files
- Html files

Tips for Specific Types of Documents

Email – Correspondence, letters, and memos are important record types in physical archives. The chances are you have saved very important information in email form. Most email programs, apps and online services include an option to download or save your emails. If you are a member of a club or organisation which distributes an email newsletter to your members it may be simpler to add the archive to your mailing list – we have a special email address for this, please contact us first to arrange this.

Photos – Add basic metadata to your files: who, what, where, and when. This will help you find and identify the files later on. This can be as simple as keeping a text document with your photos containing this information.

Consider the compression of your image files. Formats like JPEG utilize lossy compression, which means that small amounts of information will be lost, but they are smaller and easier to manage if you are concerned about storage space. TIFF and RAW formats use lossless compression where no information is lost but often result in very large files.

Websites –There are serveral tools available for preserving your personal websites. Examples of these include: The Wayback Machine, created by the Internet Archive, a digital archive of the World Wide Web and other Internet content. You can use the "Save Page Now." feature to save your own sites; Rhizome's Webrecorder, a free online tool which allows users to create archived copies of the web and download them in the Web ARChive (WARC) format; Heritrix, also developed by the Internet Archive, an open-sourced tool for creating web archives.

Social Media – If your social media accounts are important to your personal and social life, consider downloading and saving the data. There are many different ways to download your data - either through the application or with an outside tool. If you attempt to capture social media data that you did not create, use tools which do not violate the site's terms of service.

Storage Locations

There are several options for storing your digital records:

- Your laptop or desktop: This may be your primary storage location, where you edit and save documents as you work on them. You may save them on the computer's hard drive, internal flash storage, or a networked or shared drive.

- External hard drives: A larger external drive is useful for storing backup files of documents you create and value.

- Flash drives and other solid state media: These drives are inexpensive, easily obtainable, and portable. They are great for transferring or carrying your work with you.

- The Cloud: Storing files in the cloud means they are stored on a server that is managed by a third party that you can access via an Internet connection. There are a wide variety of Cloud environments including free and paid for options. If you choose a service provided by a for-profit company (such as Google, Amazon, Flickr, YouTube, Dropbox, or Apple) carefully read their user agreements so you know how your information may be used.

Please don't forget that the Cloud is just a computer which is at risk to the same threats your computer faces. Cloud storage is a very beneficial addition to your storage plan; however, it should not be the only backup method you utilize. Remember, 'There is no cloud – it's just someone else's computer'.

Bibliography:

Purdue University Libraries: Personal Digital Archiving, the Basics: http://guides.lib.purdue.edu/PDA

The Signal: Four Easy Tips for Preserving your Digital Photographs: https://blogs.loc.gov/thesignal/2011/10/four-easy-tips-for-preserving-your-digital-photographs/