

Implementing Preservation Repositories For Digital Materials: Current Practice And Emerging Trends In The Cultural Heritage Community

A Report by the PREMIS Working Group
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PREMIS—Preservation Metadata: Implementation Strategies
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Abstract

In Winter 2003-2004, the PREMIS working group conducted a survey aimed at gathering information on key aspects of planned and existing preservation repositories for digital materials. Survey questions touched on a variety of areas, such as mission, funding, preservation strategy, and access policies, but with an overarching focus on current practice for managing preservation metadata in digital archiving systems. Survey responses were received from nearly fifty institutions located in thirteen countries, and included libraries, archives, museums, and other institutions. Analysis of the responses suggests that the digital preservation community is beginning to coalesce around several emerging trends in the use and management of preservation metadata, which are enumerated and discussed at the conclusion of the report.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In June 2003, OCLC and RLG convened a Working Group, Preservation Metadata: Implementation Strategies (PREMIS), to focus on the practical aspects of implementing preservation metadata in digital preservation systems. The group has an international membership drawn from library, academic, museum, archive, government, and commercial sectors. One of the tasks in the PREMIS charge is to examine and evaluate alternative strategies for the encoding, storage, and management of preservation metadata within a digital preservation system.

To this end, in November 2003, the group distributed a survey about practices in digital preservation archiving. The survey included questions about business plans, policies, architecture and preservation strategies as well as metadata practices. Copies were sent directly to approximately seventy organizations known to be active or interested in digital preservation. The survey was also made available through several discussion lists. In February 2004, the group made a second distribution, sending thirteen more copies to museums, museum organizations and art institutes, and announcing the survey on lists targeting the museum community.

A total of forty-eight complete survey responses were received. Sixteen of the respondents were later selected for follow-up interviews to gather more information about some practices. Responses came from twenty-eight libraries, seven archives, three museums, and eleven other types of institutions. (A complete list of survey respondents is provided in [Appendix A](#).) Responses were received from thirteen different countries; 46% were from the U.S. Just under half of the organizations had at least some part of their preservation repository in production, while 70% reported being in some stage of planning or development. However, of these, only eleven institutions appeared to have realized an active preservation strategy (migration, emulation, normalization) in production.

Significant results include the following. (Numbers in parentheses refer to sections of this report containing these conclusions.)

The cultural heritage community has very little experience with digital preservation. We do not have enough experience to indicate whether the metadata these systems record, or plan to record, are adequate for the purpose. (1)

Most repositories serve the two goals of preservation and access. Less than a fifth could be called “dark archives.” (2)

National libraries, archives, university libraries, state libraries, and art museums all seem to have clearly defined constituencies in terms of who can deposit and make use of archived materials, as well as coherent sets of materials of concern. (2)

