

Preservation of born-digital heritage at the National Library of France

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Abstract:

Our cultural heritage has now largely gone digital. All types of cultural artifacts – from books to audiovisual material, from journals to artworks – now have online equivalents. The web has generated new and specific kinds of intellectual production, which leverage the capacity of digital technologies to link and mix documents together: blogs, mash-ups and even social networks are manifestations of the creativity of contemporary citizens. This tremendous dynamism has its negative side: digital publications are fragile and at risk of being quickly lost. Their preservation has thus become, for heritage institutions, a major issue. The tasks they are facing however seem huge: if the technical challenges were at first sight the most daunting, the legal, organizational and financial dimensions are now seen as equally important.

Heritage institutions have strengths in this regard. Since the end of the nineties, they have been involved in this “digital switch” by digitizing their collections to propose a worldwide access. At the same time, they started inventing ways of collecting, preserving and giving access to the new kind of heritage material produced by digital technologies themselves and especially by the web: the “born-digital” heritage. For a national library such as the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), this born-digital heritage is constituted of various kinds of documents: e-books and e-newspapers, but also Net-Art and web archives.

This contribution intends first to propose an overview of the born-digital collections that the National Library of France is entitled to preserve, focusing on those entering through legal deposit. It will then present the legal, technical and organizational ways in which the BnF is seeking to manage these collections. It will try in particular to identify where common approaches may be adopted for these different kinds of documents. Finally, the contribution will

look at the solutions BnF has investigated in order to maintain this activity in the long term: considering the financial sustainability of the preservation of a digital asset before collecting it; and benefitting from national and international cooperation.

Presenter:

Clément Oury is head of Digital legal deposit at the National Library of France. This service is in charge of collecting and preserving a large part of BnF born-digital heritage: web archives, e-newspapers and e-books. Clément Oury also serves as Treasurer of the International Internet Preservation Consortium (IIPC) and as convenor of two ISO working groups (on the “WARC archiving file format” and on “Statistics and quality issues for web archiving”). He is a graduate of the École nationale des Chartes and has a PhD in early modern history at the University of Paris-Sorbonne.