

Editorial:

Follow the Money!¹

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People with responsibility for scholarly assets agree: digital preservation is an important and urgent issue that libraries must address to fulfill their mission on behalf of future scholarship. In October 2005, Donald Waters, Program Office for Scholarly Communication with The Andrew Mellon Foundation presented an overview of strategic preservation issues in “Managing digital assets in higher education” (see <http://www.arl.org/forum05/presentations/waters.pdf>).

For centuries, libraries collected materials on behalf of their local community. Research libraries have a precious, unique role in society, to select, collect, and curate information for current and future generations of readers. According to the American Library Association’s ALA Glossary of Library and Information Science, “A [research] library contains an in-depth collection in a particular subject field (such as a technical library) or in-depth collections in several subject fields (such as a university library or a large private or public library). The collections include primary sources and provide extensive chronological and geographical coverage.”

The Web is a wonderful technology; it offers many opportunities. In the last decade, however, and accidentally, the Web became a challenge to libraries. The simplistic application of Web technology forced a change in the business relationship between librarians and publishers. Libraries no longer had the tools to take custody of materials; they could no longer build collections. Libraries now lease subscription materials or “just access” nonsubscription materials. Leasing and “just access” have disrupted the role that libraries have played in society for hundreds of years as trusted keepers of information and culture.

Because no obvious solution to this challenge exists, librarians have tried to be constructive in their responses and to look on the bright side with debates and papers about the virtues of access vs. ownership. One example is a survey and analysis of a 2000/2001 library materials budget survey and the realities of access vs. ownership

among large research libraries at <http://www.arl.org/scomm/lmbs/lmbs2001.html>.

That libraries could no longer continue to build collections was an accident, not a strategic decision. Now, however, libraries are reassessing their responses to the challenge of the Web. They are making strategic decisions to retain their roles as one of society’s important memory organizations—by continuing to build collections.

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Librarians now have an opportunity to ask two fundamental questions and to shape the answer to these questions:

1. From this moment on, who will have custody of society’s information?
2. From this moment on, who will control and govern the archival assets of society?

In the print publication environment, libraries and their communities had custody and governance over library collections, over the archive. This model had many benefits—most importantly it sheltered the information from a wide variety of threats (natural disasters, budget threats, politics).²

Within a relatively short period of time, four models for organizing these collections have emerged. They are:

- Centralized National Libraries
- Centralized Third Party
- Federated and Decentralized Local Libraries
- Decentralized Community

Enough is known about each model for the community to scrutinize them against these two questions posed about custody and governance of society’s archives. I urge the reader to keep these questions and models in mind while reviewing the papers in this special issue.

Community governance is central to the LOCKSS Program (an example of a Federated and Decentralized Local Library archiving model) and the CLOCKSS initiative (an example of a Decentralized Community

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archiving model). Library custody of assets is central to the LOCKSS Program and the CLOCKSS initiative.

In the LOCKSS program (www.lockss.org), each participating library takes custody of the information that is important for its current and future local readers. Each institution is under separate administrative control. Just as in the print model, the information is sheltered from a wide variety of threats.

All libraries are welcome to join the LOCKSS Alliance; all libraries can take custody of and preserve for the very long-term important e-journals and other assets. LOCKSS Alliance members have perpetual access to their e-subscriptions; continuing access to back content does not depend upon continuing payments to a publisher or an archive. Using a community approach and a distributed storage model, libraries work together to ensure that access is available when legally allowed. Publishers determine whether or not a library is legitimately allowed to access e-pubs for inclusion in their LOCKSS box (i.e., the library must be a subscriber and the publisher must allow preservation), but the publisher cannot “recall” assets. With the ongoing help of member libraries, the LOCKSS Alliance is approaching the level of support necessary to sustain its development and support program.

With the CLOCKSS initiative (www.lockss.org/clocks), the scholarly community is collaborating to build a trusted, large dark archive. The core value underlying this archive is that it will have distributed governance and administration. No single legal entity will be responsible for the archive’s management. This guarantees that no organizational ties (of either not-for-

profit or for-profit nature) can compromise the long-term viability of this initiative.

In production, each of the CLOCKSS libraries will hold a full set of the publishers’ e-assets. As with LOCKSS, there are multiple CLOCKSS members, working in a distributed, community-based approach to ensure that the e-assets will always be available to the broad scholarly community. Access to archive content will be initiated by a trigger event (for example, orphaned or abandoned content or, in the event of a publisher, business disruption) and reviewed by a group of people—all of whom will be working on behalf of the broader community. Our goal is to build an archive where content, when accessible, will be freely available to all. With the CLOCKSS initiative launch, publishers and librarians are working to ensure continued community governance and community custody of scholarly assets.

Our community is making positive strategic decisions about custody and governance. We are acting together to ensure that libraries remain an important memory organization. Thank goodness.

Notes

1. Memorable Quotes from All the President’s Men (film), <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0074119/quotes> (accessed March 24, 2006).
2. David S.H. Rosenthal, Thomas S. Robertson, Tom Lipkis, Vicky Reich, and Seth Morabito, “Requirements for Digital Preservation Systems: A Bottom-Up Approach,” *D-Lib Magazine* 11, no. 11 (<http://www.dlib.org/dlib/november05/rosenthal/11rosenthal.html>).