The complete guide to personal digital archiving.

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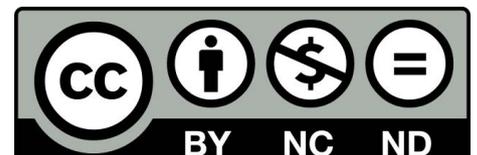
The Complete Guide to Personal Digital Archiving (edited by Brianna H. Marshall) is a valuable addition to the growing range of publications focussing on the management of digital media. In addition to its U.S. emphasis, what sets the work apart from other contributions to this emerging field, is its focus on the personal and familial. Marshall proposes that PDA (Personal Digital Archiving) is, in effect, a natural extension to the work of information professionals, and that the work may be used as a primer for information professionals beginning their own journey into PDA. However, many of the insights that may be gleaned from the text are applicable to anyone with an interest in preserving digital content.

Chelsea Gunn's introduction provides an excellent overview of the PDA landscape via the professional literature, and is of particular benefit to readers who may be unfamiliar with the topic. As such, she creates a valuable entry point into the main body of the book. Divided into five sections, each part presents the reader with an overview of a key facet of PDA.

In the first section (Learning about Personal Digital Archives Best Practices), the chapters follow a similar style and structure, with a reflective introduction highlighting key areas for consideration, before moving into the practicalities of engaging with PDA in specific contexts. The first section opens with a highly practical reflection on archiving digital photographs by Sarah Severson. Highlighting the exponential growth in digital photography, Severson raises one of the most critical issues in digital media preservation: a potential inability to engage with content due to file formal obsolescence. With this in mind, Severson guides the reader through key elements of the digital lifecycle, raising key questions and issues for consideration, such as how to choose the best software or online tools. Following this, Melody Condron highlights the tensions which exist around the concepts of privacy and ownership, and presents practical archival guidance for the main social media platforms. Casting a wide net, archiving of web content provides the focus for Cameron Cook's chapter. In it, Cook follows a similar path to Condron, with a insightful blend of theoretical reflection and practical guidance. Likewise, Yvonne Ng presents a more technical chapter concerning the archiving of audio-visual materials. In it, she echoes Severson's concerns around format obsolesce, and provides useful guidance to avoid this real concern. Last in this section, Jamie Wittenberg and Celia Emmelhainz offer us a set of 'recipes' for archiving a range of digital objects which provides a useful checklist for the topics covered by the other authors in this section.

The second section of the book opens with Jaime Mears' case study of The Washington DC Memory Lab. Moving beyond the personal approach outlined in the first section, this section of the book highlights the need for community-based services to support personal archiving. Even personal projects need collaboration! In effect, this section supports the role of libraries in enabling these projects, and tacitly makes a case for service extension and indeed support for public libraries. However, the section also emphasises a critical aspect of PDA: community engagement, as Natalie Milbrodt and Maggie Shreiner suggest in their chapter on Queens Memory, a community archiving program. The theme of community engagement continues through into Lotus Norton-Wisla and

Michael Wynne's concluding chapter in this section, and emphasises the role of community digitisation projects as fundamental to community memory and community building.

Of benefit to institutions at the beginning of their PDA adventures, not all the projects presented in this book are mature. The penultimate section focuses on audience engagement and participation in academic contexts. Amy Bocko et al provide some valuable lessons in constructing PDA programmes within U.S. liberal arts colleges. Colin Post's chapter also focuses on specific PDA events, in this case, workshops intended to support archiving activities at the Art Department in the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Artists and designers represent one constituency for whom PDA is of critical importance, although, as Post rightly notes, attention to this group's PDA needs and activities remains scant. In addition to the role of PDA within both practitioner and academic contexts, the book also shows us how information and library science continues to develop and mesh with other disciplines. For example, extending links between information-related disciplines, Sara Mannheimer and Ryer Banta present a range of PDA techniques to help students manage their research data.

The last section of this engaging work considers the social and ethical implications of personal digital archives. I found this section to be a significant contribution to a burgeoning topic which is often dominated by more technical and process-driven considerations. Matt Schultz opens this section with a series of short cases intended to highlight the ever-shifting power dynamic between content producers and platform developers. As we continue to engage with technology vendors, what effects does this have on our ability to manage our own data? Isaiah Beard considers one of the key ethical dilemmas faced by all users of social media platforms and concomitant technologies: how does data sharing impact on privacy? Helpfully, he provides some useful advice to alleviate our potential concerns. Camille Thomas' chapter, 'Black Folk Magic', presents a convincing argument for community empowerment via PDA, and emphasises the potential for personal archiving as a voice for individuals and communities whose voices are not always heard in the historical record. Lastly, Angela Galvan's chapter addresses a significant area for PDA practice and research: the digital estate of the deceased. The chapter raises some highly significant issues both for information practitioners, and indeed, for anyone with a digital presence.

The Complete Guide to Personal Digital Archiving is an insightful and engaging work which carefully balances both practical and theoretical considerations around PDA. It is a commendable addition to the field, and will benefit information practitioners, scholars and those with a personal interest.

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