

Mini-profile:

a day in the life of a digital preservation executive



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Day 16 in my new role as Executive Director of the Digital Preservation Coalition and, whilst there is a steep learning curve to tackle, so far it's all been very interesting. The Digital Preservation Coalition (DPC: <www.dpconline.org>) is a cross-sectoral member organization founded in 2001. It has an overarching role as an enabling body which works with, and informs key stakeholders in, the digital preservation arena. Its mission is to secure the preservation of digital resources in the UK and to work with others internationally to secure our global digital memory and knowledge base.

The Executive Director has a wide and varied remit working closely with the DPC Board to provide strategic leadership for the DPC, and advising the Board on development and implementation of the Coalition's strategic agenda. So, not much to do, then!

As yet there has been no 'typical day' since I moved from being IT Development & Strategy Co-ordinator at Oxford University Library Services.

Firstly, a new city and new offices, both a challenge to test my flaky sense of direction, and more importantly a new team and network of colleagues to work and collaborate with. My hope is that there will never be a typical day and so far the signs are encouraging – so, for the purpose of my UKSG commitment, a working day in the compelling world of digital preservation ...

Dear reader, let us begin one wet, windy Tuesday as autumn falls in 'God's own country'.

At 7.15 am, I'm one of the first to arrive at the Innovation Centre in York Science Park, where the DPC has its offices. The Science Park is based on York University's campus about one mile outside the city centre. I'm grateful that the alarm procedures have been dealt with – as recalling a five-digit number so early on may be a tad too much without a hot, milky drink.

I'm the first to arrive in the DPC's office (now armed with said hot, milky drink) and this quiet time allows me to check up on anything urgent

that has arrived in the 'inbox' and to remind myself of my 'checklist' for the coming day. I review and assess any incoming business and, if needs be, consult or delegate to colleagues.

Carol Jackson, the DPC Administrative Manager [pictured above on the left], is the other member of the small (but perfectly formed) secretariat which supports the distributed membership of the DPC. This small team means that good communication skills and a flexible and adaptable approach to the working day are critical. The reality being, whatever one plans, there will always be an unscheduled element to the working day – which keeps everyone on their toes!

I've no scheduled meetings this morning so I'll tackle my checklist, which for a couple of hours means drafting some pieces for the previous year's Annual Report. It is a little surreal working on something that I was not involved in at the time but it does get me 'up close and personal' with the many activities of the organization and its members over the past year.

I send this to colleagues for their input and then turn to preparing a paper that I'm presenting at a conference the following week. Unfortunately, I do not have the luxury of 'one I prepared earlier' so it's starting from first principles looking not only at the content but also at the presentational aspects of the paper. Before I realize it, it's after 2pm and my stomach cries out for sustenance – which I duly ingest at my desk. During the morning I've also been taking telephone calls and reacting to matters and issues that have popped up.

One of my major activities in these first few months is to meet the DPC Board Directors. This involves a lot of travel but affords me an opportunity not only to touch base with the directors but to engage in a 'fact finding' mission. I spend some time refining the questions and the areas which I

wish to cover at these meetings; the outcomes of which will be fed into the planning cycle for the DPC's strategic agenda.

We then have a chat in the office about the logistical arrangements for various meetings and forums that the DPC host and sponsor, and talk in general about projected plans for events later in the year. As a member organization one of our tangible deliverables to the membership is Forums and Briefing Days on topical issues of interest.

Finally, I touch base with the two consultants, both based in the US, whom I've recently commissioned to author Technology Watch Reports on topics which are exercising the digital preservation world at the moment. The exchanges cover issues such as the scoping document, terms and conditions, and delivery formats and timelines. As the commissioning agent, a part of my time is spent managing consultants in this virtual environment to achieve the DPC's aims and objectives.

I prepare for a full day of meetings in London the next day, ensuring I have documentation and papers with me which I can work on during the journey – assuming the seat reservation system is operational on the rail network!

The challenges that lie ahead are many but the most attractive feature of the post is the range and scope of the remit. It affords a heady mix of working on detailed technical issues, formulating policy and strategy with the DPC Board, networking and liaising with colleagues and members, and lobbying and engaging in awareness-raising activity with other major stakeholders and players.

One didn't know digital preservation could be quite so exciting. And so the working day is done; and 'real life' takes over for the remaining few hours – not a topic for this 'mini profile', you'll be glad to know.