

## **ACCESS GUIDANCE NOTES: ‘Let the right one in? Challenging perceptions of access to business archives’**

The following four guidance notes are for archive managers, staff and researchers to highlight access issues relating to business records. Published by Business Archives Council 2015, the guidance notes are based on presentations and discussion at the Business Archives Conference *‘Let the right one in? Challenging perceptions of access to business archives’* held at the Royal Albert Hall, London on 13 November 2014.

### **Introduction**

The issue of access to business archives can be especially challenging, due to the private and commercial nature of business. A balance needs to be struck between opening up collections and restricting access where necessary. Social media, cataloguing projects, historians and other users, and digital records all present access issues for discussion. The following conclusions were reached and discussed at the 2014 Business Archives Conference.

- Companies must be encouraged to see their archives as business assets rather than liabilities. A clear records management system in larger companies is needed to generate better archives.
- Social media tools present excellent ways for an archive to reach out to new audiences. A careful balance is needed in its use in line with corporate agendas and archive’s available resources.
- Volunteer and community engagement leads to richer collections. Volunteers and outreach are important in access and promoting collections development, in connecting and giving something to the wider business and community. In turn, staff advocates their role and attract offers which build more comprehensive, diverse collections as a result.
- Does the archivist have to be on the other side to the historian? Can they not be on both? Historians often highlight material which a corporate or collecting archive has never looked at before and identify new collections or directions in cataloguing decisions. Talking to the historian can generate ideas for development and new ways of thinking.
- Digital records (born or copy) should be approached in the same light as paper records. Setting out a well-thought out access and preservation policy is vital in giving clarity to the repository staff, stakeholders including depositors and users. Policies and procedures should demonstrate what will be done to address concerns to allay fears which creators, depositors or interested departments may have and risks associated with digital access.
- Archives have the potential for reputational damage for companies. Decades of trust and professional experience in handling sensitivities and skill should help archivists mitigate risks now and in the future.

## **Content**

It was announced at the Business Archives Council Conference 2014 that notes based on the presentations and discussion would be published as an access guide. The BAC would like to thank the conference speakers, delegates and especial thanks to the bursary students who took notes during the Conference and the Royal Albert Hall for hosting the event.

These four guidance notes were edited by Richard Wiltshire (Business Archives Council) in 2015 with Section 1 Business Archives and Social Media co-edited by Kiara King (Business Archives Council of Scotland).

### **1 Business Archives and Social Media**

*Access to Business Archives: the opportunities and pitfalls of social media* (Kiara King, Ballast Trust)

### **2 Delivering and Opening Up Archives in the Arts Sector: case studies**

*Pentabus Theatre: From cowshed to catalogue* (Rachel Griffin, Pentabus Theatre Company)

*The World's Most Famous Stage – opening up access to the Royal Albert Hall Archives* (Liz Harper: presented by Suzanne Keyte)

### **3 Let The Right One In? Gaining and Allowing Access**

*Archivists: Guides or Guardians?* (Duncan Campbell Smith: presented by Dr Mike Anson)

*Take the 109 Bus and Bring a Packed Lunch* (Maria Sienkiewicz, Barclay's Group Archives)

### **4 Access-Past, Present and Future**

*Can We, Should We, Would They Notice? Issues with Access to Digital Records* (Christopher Hilton, Wellcome Library)

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** the following guidance notes should not be taken to present the views of any one speaker or individual.

## **ACCESS GUIDANCE NOTE ONE: BUSINESS ARCHIVES AND SOCIAL MEDIA**

### **Access to Business Archives: the opportunities and pitfalls of social media**

Based on paper by Kiara King, Archivist, Ballast Trust and subsequent breakout discussion

#### **1. What is Social Media?**

Social media refers to the websites and applications that enable us to create and share content online and participate in social networking. It includes sites like twitter, facebook, blogs, youtube, flickr, pinterest and Instagram plus many others.

Use of social media by the general public has exploded in recent years and this has been mirrored in uptake of social media by the archive sector. Internet usage in 2013 in the United Kingdom: 83% of adults are online and over 66% with social media profiles. 43% of businesses have a social media profile, and this rises to 80% for firms with more than 1000 employees.

These figures represent significant numbers of users who are seeking unique content which business archives can offer. Social media provides flexible platforms for archives to share their content and raise their profile.

#### **2. Archives & social media**

##### **2.1 Benefits**

There are some general benefits to using social media whether as an archive organisation or an individual archivist.

For Archives:

- Promote your archive and its collections to a wider audience
- An audience that is engaged with you – higher participation
- Link back to your archives' website or online catalogue
- Get feedback from others about your services

For Archivists:

- Build and maintain a professional profile
- Connect and learn from other information professionals
- Keep up to date with news, articles, conferences

Within the business archive sector, social media can provide benefits specific to the corporate environment and allow managers of a corporate archive:

- Tell its parent company's brand's unique story
- Connect to a global audience
- Support business objectives
- Build an engaged community around the archive
- Find expertise and harness knowledge about records/collections from outside the archive
- Provide the wider company with authentic original content
- Raise its profile internally and externally
- Showcase images to a wider audience

## **2.2 Pitfalls:**

When used effectively social media should be a tool and become part of your daily routine. Planning and management of the work is essential to prevent it becoming a burden and avoid some of the common pitfalls:

- Not allocating time - can you sustain content and activity?
- Setting up multiple social media accounts without the time/plans to maintain them (social media accounts are easy to setup, but can be time-consuming)
- Ignoring comments - interact with your audiences by managing and answering questions (even the difficult ones!)
- If you manage multiple platforms then create tailored content for your different platforms
- Spamming/repeating the exact same content across different platforms is lazy
- Not proofreading content
- Not finding a consistent voice – consider how many people are tweeting and look at training to help staff develop the right tone for your profile
- Creating unrealistic expectations of access as a result of social media activity. There are issues of restricted access. It is important to manage users' expectations: too much audience anticipation could pose a problem.
- Measure your activity from the start so that you can demonstrate success
- Appropriate use of archival material. Providing material from your collections for main corporate social media accounts to post is a great opportunity to raise the profile of the archive but be aware that you won't always be able to control how this is used. Risk of archive material being used as 'entertainment' and 'dumbed down'.

### **3. How to Use Social Media**

Social media offers excellent opportunities for outreach and awareness raising but it does take time. The key to effective social media use is to do your research, plan what you want to achieve and integrate it into your daily working life.

#### **3.1 Research**

- Learn from what other archives/libraries/museums are doing already. What has worked for them?
- What is your parent organisation's approach to social media? Do they have a strategy you can be part of? How can the archive support the overall corporate external message?

#### **3.2 Plan**

- Take time to think about a strategic approach towards social media, especially in relation to how it will support the archive, business brands and the aims of the company.
- What will your success look like? Plan from the beginning to measure your activity and decide on the important metrics for your organisation (eg likes, retweets, follows, comments or shares).
- Develop a content calendar, which will help you to plan social media activity according to events and anniversaries.
- Using images is good but consider their copyright status and make sure that it is happy for images to be picked up on and to be distributed elsewhere online. Businesses can be very aware of their image and how it is used within a legal framework. Some firms have teams to trawl the internet in order to curtail it, but most businesses cannot afford to do that so an archive should be cautious about copyright and corporate sensitivities.

#### **3.3 Get started**

- Choose the platform or platforms that are right for you. You don't have to use them all! There are multiple options so decide which suits your needs best and how much time is available to devote to these activities and what sort of information is to be shared.
- Decide whether the archive will have its own account. Alternatively you could decide to just provide content for the corporate account (remember the archive may not have control or be given credit for this account).

A repository may wish to control its own account, allow staff to use their personal accounts or support the corporate account. Social media can be used on different levels, for example Twitter accounts can be set up for the archive repository as a whole, or just for individual projects.

An individual following numerous platforms may get annoyed and could engage less due to repetition of information and too many notifications. There is a balance between ease and non-repetition of effort and the level of annoyance/new content for the user.

### **3.4 Things to consider**

Think about the stories you want to tell. Don't always go for the easy link. An archive should always be careful of what story it wants to tell. For example rather than just finding a Christmas image, because it is December, consider if there is a deeper, more in-depth or relevant meaning.

## **4. Options**

### **Twitter**

Twitter allows instant communication with your followers through brief (140 character) tweets to share news and content.

- Repositories can also embed the Twitter feed on their websites or blogs.
- Images are popular for being retweeted and engaged with. Popular hashtags such as #onthisday or #throwbackthursday (or #tbt) can be used by businesses as a hook to show items from the past.
- Make the most of hashtags and join conversations. Hashtags allow archives to engage a broader audience.
- Be aware that short tweets will lack context and may lead to the 'dumbing down' of the archive neglecting the depth and the stories within it.

### **Examples:**

- Marks & Spencer <https://twitter.com/MandSHeritage>
- BT Archives <https://twitter.com/BTArchives>
- Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) [https://twitter.com/RBS\\_Archives](https://twitter.com/RBS_Archives) and also good projects accounts such as RBS remembers [https://twitter.com/RBS\\_WW1](https://twitter.com/RBS_WW1) and <https://twitter.com/JohnoftheBank>
- Coke Archives [https://twitter.com/coke\\_archives](https://twitter.com/coke_archives)

### **Flickr**

Flickr (with 92million users) is used as an image sharing platform for visual collections such as photographs.

- Consider copyright issues and future image use when planning to upload images.

- Putting up a representative sample allows a Flickr account to serve as a shop window to attract an audience to a repository's collections.
- Flickr allows for the creation of communities for collections and enables repositories to track who is engaging with images.
- Flickr also allows increased curation than Twitter, allowing for content to be given detailed context. For example it can be used to crowd source help with the identification of unlabelled photographs.

### **Examples:**

- Ballast Trust <https://www.flickr.com/photos/ballasttrust/>
- British Postal Museum & Archive <https://www.flickr.com/photos/postalheritage>
- University of Glasgow <https://www.flickr.com/photos/uofglibrary>
- National Library of Scotland <http://www.flickr.com/photos/nlscotland>

### **Blogs**

Blogs provide a platform for an archive to share regular detailed news and information about their collections, typically comprised of several paragraphs with supporting images.

- It is estimated that 70% of internet users read blogs.
- 'Burden of the Blog' - blogs demand more thought and time, a consistent voice and maintained regular content. A neglected blog can reflect badly on the business. Project blogs are good as they have specified content and end times.
- Blogging can be a great way to share detailed information. Free software is available to create a blog so relatively easy to start. If an archive repository does not have enough content or resource to blog regularly a regular slot in the corporate account might be the solution. The archive slots can be popular, and provide easy 'brownie points' for the corporate archivist!
- When you've blogged you can promote new posts via your other social media accounts such as twitter.

### **Examples:**

- Laura Ashley <http://www.lauraashley.com/blog/uncategorized/archive>
- Coca Cola conversations <http://www.coca-colacompany.com/topics/coca-cola-conversations/>
- Liberty <http://www.liberty.co.uk/blog/category/liberty-history-2/>

## Facebook

Facebook has 1.2 billion users. Half of the UK population has a Facebook account.

- Facebook is very easy for people to comment or ‘like’ what archive repositories are submitting or doing.
- It allows you to share images, links and more detailed posts similar to a blog but within the framework of the facebook community.

### Examples:

- RBS <https://www.facebook.com/rbsarchives/>
- Unilever Archives <https://www.facebook.com/Unilever-Archives-119014988125994/>
- Coke Archives <https://www.facebook.com/CokeArchives/>

## Instagram

Instagram is a photograph sharing site and one of the fastest growing platforms that excels at brand engagement.

- Not widely used by archive repositories.
- Opportunity for archives to support corporate accounts and provide images for #tbt #throwbackthursday type posts.
- However, there is some doubt over meaningful engagement as individuals view images and move on without knowing where they are from or entering into further research.

### Examples:

- Guinness Brewery <https://instagram.com/guinness/>
- Clarks Shoes <https://instagram.com/clarksshoes/>
- Harper Collins <https://instagram.com/harpercollinsuk/>
- Brian Duffy (photographer) [https://instagram.com/duffy\\_archive/](https://instagram.com/duffy_archive/)
- Coke Archives [https://instagram.com/coke\\_archives](https://instagram.com/coke_archives)
- Internet Archive <https://instagram.com/iabookseurope>
- US National Archives <https://instagram.com/usnatarchives>

## Pinterest

Pinterest allows an archive to pull content together from the web to form an inspiration board and encourages a high level of engagement. 80% of pinned content comes from within Pinterest and it is the fastest growing social media tool with 70 million users globally.

- It can act as a shop window for your collections (similar to flickr).
- If your parent organisation has an account a heritage board within the corporate account would be popular.
- Good to know - Marks and Spencer trialled History Pin and Pin-interest as well as Twitter. Whilst the later was successful, the first two were less so. Why? Because these were more labour intensive and the instantaneous and brief nature of tweets suited the M&S material much better.

### Examples:

- British Postal Museum and Archive  
<https://www.pinterest.com/postalheritage/>
- Ballast Trust <https://www.pinterest.com/ballasttrust>
- AGA Rangemaster <https://www.pinterest.com/agavist/>
- Maersk Line <https://www.pinterest.com/maerskline/>
- John Lewis <https://www.pinterest.com/johnlewisretail/> and 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary <https://www.pinterest.com/johnlewisretail/jl150-through-the-decades/>

### Video sharing (youtube/vimeo)

Similar to the photo-sharing platforms there are sites that allow for video sharing such as YouTube with over a billion users or vimeo.

- Many brands have a presence on video sharing sites and material from the archive will give them unique content to share.
- Video sharing gives new life to digitised content from your collection.
- Sharing films is a good way to showcase the archive to employees and also external users with specially made 'introduction to' or 'behind-the-scenes'.

### Examples:

- BT Archives  
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLt7dJbVNtnzmFihDdtAeCaJ5CbXhNilUE>
- Unilever celebrates 30 years of archives  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=18afeDrrhnw>
- IBM <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JPOxXGrCj3k>
- HSBC 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary  
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLqeNOIDrxqYoZwyjgYtwQNoIWnCAyRsE8>
- Scottish Southern Energy <https://vimeo.com/135448373>
- Coke Archives <https://www.youtube.com/user/CokeConversations>
- Coors beer <https://www.youtube.com/user/officialcoorsbanquet>

## 5. Questions

### **5.1 Is an online visitor as ‘valuable’ as a physical one? Does it matter if someone accessing content or information on social media does not then equate to them accessing the archive physically?**

It does not matter whether accessing content online leads to physically visiting the archive, any engagement with a user is positive and is just as tangible. In measuring the level of engagement online visitors make it is important to know who they are, what they are doing and what they are getting out of it. Is it simply a 30 second browse or are they spending time online, downloading documents and planning preliminary research for a visit?

When users come in to visit archive it is easier to measure the amount of usage they make of resources. One way of measuring social media is to look at marketing events on Twitter, and seeing how many link visits and tickets booked from there, also using feedback forms when someone physically accesses you to ask how they found it.

Social media allows an archive to reach people who do not know they were interested. Social media encourages users to come and visit an archive. It also reaches people who may not normally have physical access archive for example school pupils or elderly. Viewing items online prevents any issues to physical items. Individuals are likely to come back to ask more questions about collections. Social media tends to encourage engagement with younger audiences. Online users can be very valuable as they can more easily provide and correct of information, such as in catalogues.

### **5.2 What is the value of ‘like’, a ‘retweet’, etc? How does this equate to a wider impact or translate into tangible benefits?**

A ‘like’ or a ‘retweet’ are indicative of engagement. A ‘like’ can be almost been viewed as a throwaway and does not require much thought. The action of ‘liking’ is also contained and does not reach other followers whereas a re-tweet means there is some thought and decision making in retweeting in under the tweeter’s own name. ‘Retweets’ to followers or comments are more valuable as they indicate action and sharing to a wider audience. For businesses there is value in social media being a free way to promote brand awareness and have ‘common currency’ with marketing and other teams. There are instances where they have generated media interest.

However, if an archive experiences an increase in ‘likes’ and followers, does it really suggest a deeper level of engagement (such as following up and consulting the archives in more depth)? A deeper level of engagement may be sought by thinking about niche users when coming up with content. Engagement in any way

is however important: if an archive does not have the means to put into online resources then any attempt at a public face is better than none.

### **5.3 What barriers have you/would you be likely to come up against in your organisation by setting up social media accounts to interact with the public?**

Some businesses have corporate social media accounts and archive staff are not permitted to have their own accounts. There can be resistance from management about setting up accounts because of a belief that social media is to a certain extent uncontrollable and could damage the brand.

Often social media outreach of archives has to be approved leading to a business approach being imposed as opposed to an archival one. The business can be so large that in order to engage with social media, approval is required by and interference comes from departments such as legal, IT and communications. Also, some businesses believe that by making people aware of the archive it will lead to people wanting to physically visit which they may not be able to accommodate leading to them wanting to keep the archive unknown to the public.

For corporate archives, concentrating on internal social media is important as gets employees to engage with the archive, raises the profile and overall corporate value. To encourage a business of the merits of social media, archive staff may wish to suggest a trial period. An archive should have material ready to go otherwise using social media can be labour intensive and a drain on resources. One way of doing things is to build the use of social media into the archive process. For example after cataloguing and perhaps scanning parts of a collection tweet about it and do a blog entry.

## **6. Resources**

- Kate Theimer's book *Web 2.0 Tools and Strategies for Archives and Local History Collections* and blog <http://www.archivesnext.com/>
- Rebecca Hopman's social media guides <http://rebeccahopman.com/socialmedia/>
- The Interactive Archivist: Case studies in using web 2.0 to enhance the archive <http://interactivearchivist.archivists.org/>
- Society of American Archivists 'Meaningful Use of Social Media by Corporate Archivists' <http://www2.archivists.org/groups/business-archives-section/meaningful-use-of-social-media-by-corporate-archivists>
- Culture 24 social media report (includes metrics toolkit and comparisons) <http://weareculture24.org.uk/projects/action-research/how-to-evaluate-success-online/>
- Business archives on twitter, a list <https://www.pinterest.com/busarchives/business-archives-using-twitter/>

## **ACCESS GUIDANCE NOTE TWO: DELIVERING AND OPENING UP ARCHIVES IN THE ARTS SECTOR**

### **Case studies**

#### **1 From cowshed to catalogue: Pentabus Theatre Company**

Pentabus was formed in 1974, originally a West Midlands Arts Organisation, covering five counties travelling as a ‘theatre in a bus’. In 2014 based on a farm in Shropshire, Pentabus aims to become the nations’ rural theatre company with the mission to produce quality new theatre about the contemporary rural world.

Company records including photographs and audio-visual material had been amassed and the company was due to celebrate its 40th Anniversary. Pentabus had no professional archive experience and proceeded with trepidation: Where to start in sorting out 40 years’ worth of material? Theatre companies tend to ‘live in the moment’ and the following questions were raised by members: ‘Is the backstory important or should focus be on here and now?’ ‘Who would care that they had an archive?’ ‘Who would engage with it?’ ‘Are we archiving for archiving sake?’

#### **Three key strands to archive strategy:**

- Acquisition of new material to supplement existing collection: A major problem was that nobody knew what the first show was. Pentabus issued a call out to members and audiences for new material which resulted in the first two programmes for first two shows.
- Cataloguing: in 2013, Pentabus successfully applied to the Business Archives Council Cataloguing Grant for Arts Businesses. The grant paid for 20 days cataloguing by a professional archivist in partnership with Shropshire Council’s archive service. Records were deposited at Shropshire Archives to make them publically available, with data uploaded to their online catalogue. Pentabus raised awareness of the archive through press releases, performing arts courses, talks, content on past productions section of Pentabus website, contact made with universities, social media, particularly the Throwback Thursday (#TBT) tool used for help in identifying pictures and Tweets from archival profession and theatre profession.
- Volunteers from Pentabus and Shropshire Archives: 5 volunteers contributed over 250 hours sorting items and photographs, and digitising the visual collection to be put online. One volunteer used the items to research where the company toured.

**Benefits for the company:** a wider reach, a reconnection with the past gave greater clarity on future direction, confidence, material for social media, encouraged donations, raised profile in other sectors, and an ongoing relationship with Shropshire Archives. Pentabus plan to make regular deposits to Shropshire Archive Service around every 2-5 years and collect as they go along to keep full sets of material.

- Discovered 150 shows, 47 writers, 350 venues visited, over 1,000 performances
- Touring history – mapped in detail show by show
- Connections to old Pentabus company members

**Lessons:**

- Cataloguing has a ripple effect beyond the project. Outreach and encouraging access to archives can throw up new material and knowledge. Access + community = collection building.
- Some businesses do not think their archives have relevance or interest beyond themselves. Businesses do not necessarily think about preserving their material – they ‘live in the moment’. The archive profession need to make businesses understand importance of their records.
- Importance of anniversaries and key dates and how they can be utilised in support of business archives.
- The value of volunteers in expertise, saving professional staff time sorting photographs, digitisation and research, and profile-raising.
- Collaboration in partnership can be crucial to success.

For more information on Pentabus Theatre visit [www.pentabus.co.uk](http://www.pentabus.co.uk)

For details on BAC cataloguing grants visit [www.businessarchivescouncil.org.uk](http://www.businessarchivescouncil.org.uk)

## **2 The World's Most Famous Stage – opening up access to the Royal Albert Hall Archives**

The Royal Albert Hall (RAH) founded in 1871 traces its origins to the 1851 Great Exhibition. However only recently did the business turned to its archives to enhance its public offer. RAH uses the material to identify stories with which they can engage visitors through exhibitions, tours and talks. Further initiatives include digitisation programme and use of social media.

RAH began an archive strategy to enhance public benefits through increased accessibility, collecting, preservation and exploitation of the archives. The RAH archive was officially established in circa 2009 to document the history and variety of performance, Grade I listed building, the organisation and its members and staff. The collections are divided into RAH Events – posters, performance programmes; RAH business records – minute books, plans and architectural drawings, about the building; Charles Graham-Dixon Dutch Master paintings bequest; Victoria and Albert; Queen's Hall (bombed in 1941, used for Proms concerts); Exhibitions 1851-1872.

RAH is a business but also a registered charity with educational objectives. Archive development is designed to attract wider audiences and use as an educational resource. The outreach programme includes schools, retirement, and community groups. Activities have included displays, well supported show and tells for staff in lunch hours, talks, content for website 'Life at the Hall - Behind the Scenes at the Royal Albert Hall', blogs and support to corporate social media platforms, press enquiries including TV programmes. Outputs include:

- An event database with c30,000 events and archive catalogue searchable.
- Digitisation has been carried out in-house using volunteers and externally - covering programmes, handbills, slides, posters. Interactive mural – images produced by archive with the aim to have searchable touch screens.
- A duplicate handling collection is put together for the tours. Merchandising and image licensing generate income with an 'order your own print' service (including to film companies). Time line and time machine for website.

### **Lessons:**

- Understand why a business wants to use archives: in each context the motives change: businesses which also have charitable status may have specific education and outreach objectives which the archives can support.
- Undertake exhibitions and talks to achieve wider engagement.
- Internal advocacy is important: show and tells work well for staff.
- Event lists or databases are popular and meet a large proportion of enquiries.

Visit [www.royalalberthall.com](http://www.royalalberthall.com) (about the Hall – Our History)

## **ACCESS GUIDANCE NOTE THREE: LET THE RIGHT ONE IN? GAINING AND ALLOWING ACCESS**

### **1 Business History researcher's perspective: an author's wish list in an ideal world**

Archives represent one of the indispensable ingredients of history - in an ideal world unrestricted access would therefore be a good thing for all! Fully accessible archives should be compulsory by law - both public and private. A minimum access requirement is a comprehensive, easily navigable catalogue. The catalogue should be like a map with an 'X marks the spot' to buried treasure, with an overview to help researchers find the 'most interesting' material in the collection.

Archivists should be prepared to treat the professional historian a little differently. There should ideally be up to one-two hours' conversation with archivist to build good relations. Archivists should allow the researcher to cast their net widely in placing requests. An 'after service care' should include research assistance with a quick turnover for enquiries (although this would be asking a lot of a service without resources to meet this). Sometimes returning to the archive is impractical - archivists should be ready to look up citations for readers where the researcher's note-taking is found to be inadequate or lacking.

Laptops and digital photography are not always good research tools and should be discouraged. Reading and note-taking needs to be encouraged as the first step in sorting the wheat from the chaff, in sieving the history provided in the documents. Digital photography allows the researcher to take archive to the desktop but reading and appraising information is simply postponed and can get overwhelming.

Opening the archive is as important as protecting it: the archivist is a guide as well as a guardian.

#### **Key points**

- Archive staff should be aware of different user demands and expectations.
- Archivists should guide researchers - a detailed navigable catalogue is vital with explanatory introductions and associated guides.
- Researchers may not necessarily be fully aware of an archive's resources and competing needs of the business and other stakeholders.
- Archivists and researchers discuss access together to managing expectations.
- Archives should be prepared to facilitate research funded by the business, for example in writing an official history. Research has long-term benefits in assisting the archivists with analysis of sources which they cannot undertake themselves.

## **2 Understanding the corporate archivist perspective**

A big issue is people knowing that a corporate archive even exists. Access can be a real challenge where an archive environment not designed for that express purpose and where there are limited staff numbers. Some archives can be physically difficult to reach (for example Barclays Group Archives is situated on an industrial estate outside Manchester) and may not have an online catalogue but may be willing to provide remote access by sending out lists, undertaking research and scanning. Where a researcher is going to make the effort to travel it is in the interests of both parties for the archive to help the researcher make the best of their visit. Archivists should engage visitors in further conversations about research queries, and carry out catalogue searches with them in order to identify further relevant records.

The corporate archive must meet the needs of its employer first - archivists have to be available instantly for internal requests or questions will soon start to be raised about the archives' purpose and value. A public access statement may therefore outline that access to the archives is a special privilege. This is a reassurance to company that access to their records can be halted when necessary in the interests of the business. It is important for archivists to request copies of the results of research undertaken in the archive as it can feed into what the corporate archive does. Archivists also need to be careful in allowing access to client records and their responsibilities to customers. Blanket closures can help protect current business interests.

There are also legal restrictions on allowing access. It can be reassuring to an archivist to be able to call on the support of colleagues in the legal, marketing or brand teams in meeting access. If the archivist demonstrates the value of the archives to these key decision-makers, they will very likely support the service when needed. The archive can be used to help legal defend the business, to help Brand promote the business, and to help Media Relations deal quickly and accurately with a press enquiry. The wider business can also appreciate the contribution which archive access makes to social responsibility and citizenship agendas.

Most companies recognise that they need to be good corporate citizens and be transparent. Part of that is allowing access to their archives and the history of their business, even if it does mean revealing links to practices which are now disapproved of. The corporate archive can be witness to practices in the past that no one is proud of such as slavery as well as progressive aspects such as the presence of abolitionists in the past. Putting out the other side of the story out is not always possible - matters are fine when debated within the confines of academia, but which can do immeasurable reputational damage in the hands of the media with headlines such as 'bank fortune is from African slave trade'.

Denying access to archives does not stop the stories from being there. Archives have the potential to help draw a line under a distasteful aspect of the company history, if the value can be demonstrated, to defend, and promote the business. The stories will always be there, regardless of whether the archive allows people in or not. By allowing access a company demonstrates transparency and a desire to present a wider shared history. An archive should enable people to seek out the facts and draw their own conclusions.

It is important to remember that businesses run their operations for present and future. Their archives are a by-product and that the range of records they are obliged by law to keep is limited. A business which has chosen to care for their archives should therefore be respected and their interests protected. Companies should not feel threatened by their archives, but have confidence in a reliable and accessible archive and in the people responsible for their unique asset.

### **Key points**

- Access can be time consuming and difficult for a small staff team, especially where a research environment is not available.
- Transparency is vital for public trust and can in turn help businesses.
- Businesses are not obliged to keep corporate archives.
- Academic research can provide a way of further research into corporate archives. Archivists should therefore ask the researchers to give a copy of their research to the archive.
- Prioritising internal enquiries and calling on the support of colleagues in the legal, marketing or brand teams can help support the profile of the archive by demonstrating value to key decision makers.

### **3 Discussion**

- Access and legislation: Access can only happen if records are preserved and managed in the first place. There is insufficient clarity with regard to good practice in access to corporate archives. This is partly due to the lack of legislation determining what records companies are required to keep and should provide access to. Increased public-private partnerships also blur responsibilities such as those required under Freedom of Information which impacts on the public sector. It is unlikely that specific legislation will be enforced to protect corporate archives or force businesses to keep archives. A legislative framework sufficient to accommodate all sectors would be difficult to achieve because legislation varies for each business sector which in turn impacts on different business records.
- Presence: Not knowing what records exist is one of the major barriers to access. Corporate archives which often struggle are those where the business does not allow external access or have any representation of the archive and any finding aid on the corporate website.

- Catalogues: Better use should be made of catalogues for access. Cataloguing projects needs to include time for formulation of introductory sentences about the background, scope and research value in the material help archive staff and researchers. It is also important to point out what is not there as well as what is. Blanket closures may need to be in place and with the business. To meet data protection legislative requirements some archives have adopted consistent rules. For example staff records, assuming a minimum age of 16: by adding 84 years + 1 year to the end date of a file to determine the closure.
- Access policies: Archivists should be consistent in their offer to researchers. Access policies should be formulated and reviewed and are a requirement for Accredited Services. Statements should be short and easy to understand for users. Access policies do not have to provide for physical access, they can be simply for virtual access.
- Photography: changes the nature of the relationship between the user and the document. Researchers taking photographs has become an issue because users get through much more material than previously, and this means more documents for archive staff to get out and put away. It is considered that damage is more likely to be caused to the material through rapid handling. Access rules are created for practical reasons and therefore need to be adapted as usage changes. Where large scale copying is permitted, researchers photographing collections are essentially digitising them and archivists should request/charge copies.
- Research feedback: knowing the outcomes of research can help with access. Footnotes in articles point researchers towards records which have been used before and the article therefore provides information on the content of collections and how they can be used.
- Conservation: there is a concern over lack of conservators employed in business archives which means some records are either not accessible or assessed professionally as to suitable handling and treatment.

## **ACCESS GUIDANCE NOTE FOUR: ACCESS – PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE**

### **'Can We, Should We, Would They Notice?' Issues with Access to Digital Records**

It is useful to demystify approaches to working with digital records and simply view them in the same way as traditional handling of physical formats. The only real differences between the two are technical issues. The Open Archival Information System [OAIS] model is a framework of dealing with digital material and the workflow around it. The model is used in the structuring of digital preservation software. In simple terms the model can be seen a process of: “get stuff - put stuff somewhere - show stuff to people - keep stuff safe”.

#### **Planning access to digital records**

In an ideal world digital records would be made available on the internet to reach a wider audience. However a risk-based approach is needed to plan access to digital material.

Transfer of paper records has been seen as a solution to a storage problem only and access issues are usually not considered. Depositors may however see allowing access to digital material as fraught with risks comparing likely research experience to the use of online search engines, in that ‘anyone’ can see it. Digital-born records also contain information within the last 20 years with likely business, staff and customer sensitivities. The potential for leaks of sensitive information and consequent harm may lead to corporate fear of likely reputational damage caused by allowing access to digital items. Archivists should educate corporate stakeholders and ensure that the level of risk is no different to that with paper records.

In determining policy the following questions and points should be considered:

#### **Use**

- Who is the material being made available for? Internal users/ historians? Large or small audiences? Onsite or remote access?
- What are the implications of legislation surrounding data protection, freedom of information, copyright and associated issues. In the digital world, most text formats are easily searchable and therefore a breach of legislation is greater.
- Semantic software can be used to search jpegs or detect tone which could be used in establishing content of emails as to whether to restrict access or not.

## **Creation and acquisition**

- What controls can be set on record creation to resolve fundamental issues over unsorted items? Strong relationships with record creators and good records management help maintain meaningful filing naming and structures on document creation. Controls can be exercised during accessioning making close and clear relationships between archive repository and depositor are vital.
- What are the expectations of record creators/depositing departments? They need to be aware of the constraints, that not every file can be simply opened up or closed.
- What is the bulk to be dealt with?
- Are there variant versions which need preserving?

## **Formats and migration**

- What is the range of formats? The issue of obsolescence and diversity of formats not so much of a big issue than first thought. Prioritise the most common formats. If there is a range of formats assess the content as it may not be worth the effort and resources to unlock/migrate certain documents.
- Original v. Dissemination copy-functionality v. Lockdown: digital material needs to be migrated over time to contemporary formats, but the original formats should be preserved where possible. This has server space implications, and some loss of functionality. For example the migration of Microsoft Excel spreadsheets to PDFs could be a problem with the loss of certain arithmetic functions and formulas. Relaying information is different from preserving functionality and policy decisions have to be made accordingly. The law on copyright has not kept pace with digital preservation, essentially migrating file formats is a form of copying.
- Original digital carriers such as CDs become obsolete over time and therefore unless they are specially produced, for example a final published oral history CD, they do not necessarily need to be retained once files are retrieved, saved on or ingested into a digital preservation repository or server.

## **Metadata and changing approaches to cataloguing**

Metadata (information about documents) is key in proving the evidential value of digital records and providing information about digital files and their formats. The Metadata Encoding Transmission Standard (METS) is an encoding XML standard that enables details about formats to be documented (for example 'I am this and please use this programme to access me'). The standard gives information and instruction on handling of digital records can be demonstrated using the 'Teabag Analogy': there is dependency on information on the wrapper, as the tea bag itself will not provide all the information that is needed in how the tea is to be handled.

Metadata must be reliable in order to catalogue and retrieve records contained in digital repositories. The sheer bulk of digitally-born and copy-digital records poses major issues for storage and for cataloguing. With limited time, the bulk makes it difficult to arrange, appraise and catalogue. In addition ‘searchability’ of digital documents reduces the need for detailed cataloguing. Where the content of documents can be searched, detailed descriptions and complex hierarchies are no longer required or even achievable. The availability of existing mechanised file metadata change how catalogue descriptions are created. There is therefore a move towards ‘discoverability’: the item-level content becomes more important for the information they present and less the catalogue hierarchy, unless well-structured filing systems have been in place.

Visit Digital Preservation Coalition for handbooks, best practice and latest developments [www.dpconline.org](http://www.dpconline.org)

**END**

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**IMPORTANT NOTE:** these guidance notes should not be taken to present the views of any one speaker or individual.

