



Prestospace to the Rescue, Workshop

14 & 15 May 2007; Vienna

Broadcast archives are hugely interesting, and very much at risk – but somehow conferences on archive preservation technology tend to be a line-up of engineers showing powerpoint about ‘technical architecture’ and metadata in XML. Christoph Bauer of ORF, who is not only an archive technologist but also has produced TV programmes – decided to ‘produce’ a PrestoSpace event: **Prestospace to the Rescue**. A damsel in distress (or ‘audiovisual archivist in agony and anxiety’) would be in peril of losing her audiovisual content – owing to deterioration (of the media, not the damsel) or obsolescence (of the formats, not the damsel). In addition, much of the content was too fragile to be handed directly to the public – and so the collection had poor access. In fact, there was a crisis – get the collection known, used and preserved – or get out of town!

At a marvellous venue in Vienna, 45 people [Prestospace specialists, audio-visual archive students, archivists, consultants and service providers representing 12 companies, 4 colleges and 13 archives from 15 countries] came together to play out this modern ‘Perils of Pauline’. The archivist wasn’t strapped to the rails with a train approaching – but she was “strapped for cash”, with deterioration and obsolescence bearing down, and a heartless overseer lowering over her, demanding access. In fact, demanding access for everyone – and free – and 24 hours per day every day – and via the Internet. It’s more than a poor self-respecting archivist can bear!

With the opening theme music and the roll of the opening title frame, Christoph Bauer (ORF) kicked off the **Prestospace to the Rescue** workshop, May 14th and 15th in Vienna. Karin Westerink, (B&G) gave a brilliant performance as an archivist from “a small regional archive situated somewhere in the heart of Europe”, helping all present remember that planning and running a bulk digitisation project is not something you just start one afternoon over coffee with your colleagues!

It all started when Karin was first asked about her “problem”. “What problem?” she asked. Oh, her manager told her that her material had to be made available over the internet. Well, what sort of material did she have? “I don’t know, we can’t play any of the tapes, we don’t have the machines. And well, we have some card files somewhere. The man who has worked in our archive for 40 years just retired and he actually knows where they are. I could call him maybe.”

Well, I see. Who are your customers? And what do they need? “Oh do I need to know that? They are very nice people, I know that”.

With that kickoff the first point was made: Part of your planning involves knowing a little about what you have and what you’d like to do with it. Richard Wright from the BBC came up with the first PrestoSpace help designed to help define needs and goals: The Storage and Archive Management tools including the Preservation Guide Wiki <http://wiki.prestospace.org/>. Once she was clear about a strategy for the archive, and had a ‘preservation and access plan’, then PrestoSpace had online tools to estimate costs: the Cost Calculator, the Storage Analysis Tool and the Preservation Calculator. <http://prestospace-sam.ssl.co.uk/>. These tools are designed to help build a ‘business case’ for a project, and then track the month-by-month progress of the project.

Okay, now she had a plan, but she needed the technology for getting that analogue content into digital form. The right service provider with the right equipment was needed! But what equipment is available? Jean-Hugues Chenot from INA described [the digitisation equipment developed during the project](#) based on the needs expressed by archives: a report providing [information on problem videotapes](#) (by year, type and problem) so that you can estimate the most difficult tapes; a magneto-

optical **playback machine for reel to reel audio tapes**, an **optical playback machine for audio disks**, the Samma **videocassette Robotic System** including timebase corrector and automatic tape cleaner to do large amount of videotape cassettes; an advanced **film digitisation scanner** and a tool which would help a service provider **manage their workflow**, including capture of all the preservation metadata produced during the transfer.

Karin was feeling better by the hour, now she had the digital files. But she had to think about how much she would like to “clean them up”. The discussion followed – how far should we go with cleaning up material, how important is it to keep the original file and create a second file that you apply ‘restoration’ techniques to? And what techniques are there? Walter Plaschzug ended the afternoon by demonstrating [various tools developed for the PrestoSpace project](#) including the **moving image retoucher** and various **DIAMANT restoration** modules. The archive’s material was looking and sounding better and better!

The next day we got together for the final push: our ‘content’ looks great but those catalogue descriptions really need help! And we don’t want just text, we want to see and hear that stuff online! In stepped Giorgio Dimino from the RAI. His first point: there’re plenty of tools for enhancing your descriptions and ‘publishing’ it online but you really must understand your archive’s workflow to ensure that you use the right technology for the right purpose at the right phase in your work process. Otherwise, you may only create bottlenecks and wonder why you started with this digital process to begin with! The type of content determines which tools are best to apply. He then went on to demonstrate [the manual and automated metadata enrichment tools and the publication platform](#) which allows a big array of searching functionality. And finally the ‘orchestrator’ was demonstrated - which makes sure that all the preservation results are linked with your descriptive metadata in one system.

Karin never thought she could do it, but yes, she was able to get her unused, unknown analogue material off the shelf and onto the web! The final song played, the credits rolled and off we went, to start more preservation projects (and rescue more damsels) in our own archives.