

**Humans:
the ultimate tool for preserving
digital information!**

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Overview

- **Humans**
- **Information**
- **Access and preservation**
- **Evaluating assets**
- **Risk and consequence**
- **Humans as digital preservation tools?**

Humans

- The ends of information are human ends
- Digital information exists because humans
 - ❖ create it
 - ❖ consume it
 - ❖ desire it
- Is digital information created because we can preserve it for the long run or is it driven by immediate human information desire?
- Humans define the economic factors by which digital information is valued, used and ultimately retained

Some examples of information loss

- **The Library of Alexandria – the loss of the universal library?**
- **Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium – burned 1914 and 1940**
 - ❖ **230,000 books**
 - ❖ **800 of them incunabula printed before the year 1500**
 - ❖ **>900 manuscripts**
- **Anna Amalia Library, Weimar, Germany – Sept 2004 fire**
 - ❖ **30,000 unique books plus paintings destroyed, many more damaged**
 - ❖ **“The literary memory of Germany has suffered severe damage,” German Culture Minister Christina Weiss**
- **How do we assess the economic, cultural and social damage and thus make reparations for the loss?**
- **Can we identify losses of similar scale in the digital realm?**

Information

- Information has purpose only to humans
- Preserving information is another human purpose – it can only happen through an act of will and desire
- Format is less important than the content and experience we receive: users are becoming “format agnostic”
(2004 Information Format Trends: Content, Not Containers, OCLC)
- But to digital preservation format is very important
- Information economy: US industrial output weighs the same as it did 100 years ago, even though real Gross Domestic Product is 20 times higher. This reflects the higher knowledge content of goods and services in the last 20 years.
- But is the information economy mutating?
- Long live the attention economy!

Information versus attention economies

- **“The claim that the Internet will replace libraries often is based on questionable assumptions. Three common misconceptions are that all useful information exists somewhere on the Internet, that information is available without cost, and that it can be found by anyone willing to spend enough time searching for it.”**

Borgman, C. L. (2001) *From Gutenberg to the global information infrastructure: access to information in the networked world*, The MIT Press

- **“iPod therefore iAm”**

Cover headline, Newsweek July 26, 2004 issue

What this means for digital preservation

- Attention is vital to economic sustainability
- Therefore access is valued more than preservation by our consumers who are ultimately our benefactors
- In the information/attention economy without access there are no long term preservation strategies that will be economically sustainable
- Linking access and preservation to human information desire rather than grand technical schemes will thus be most economically sustainable
- The question remains: how do we select what we preserve?

Top down from information to money

➤ In an ideal world...

policy and information goals



identify collections of value to goals



plan most effective route to preserve resource



seek funding or revenue

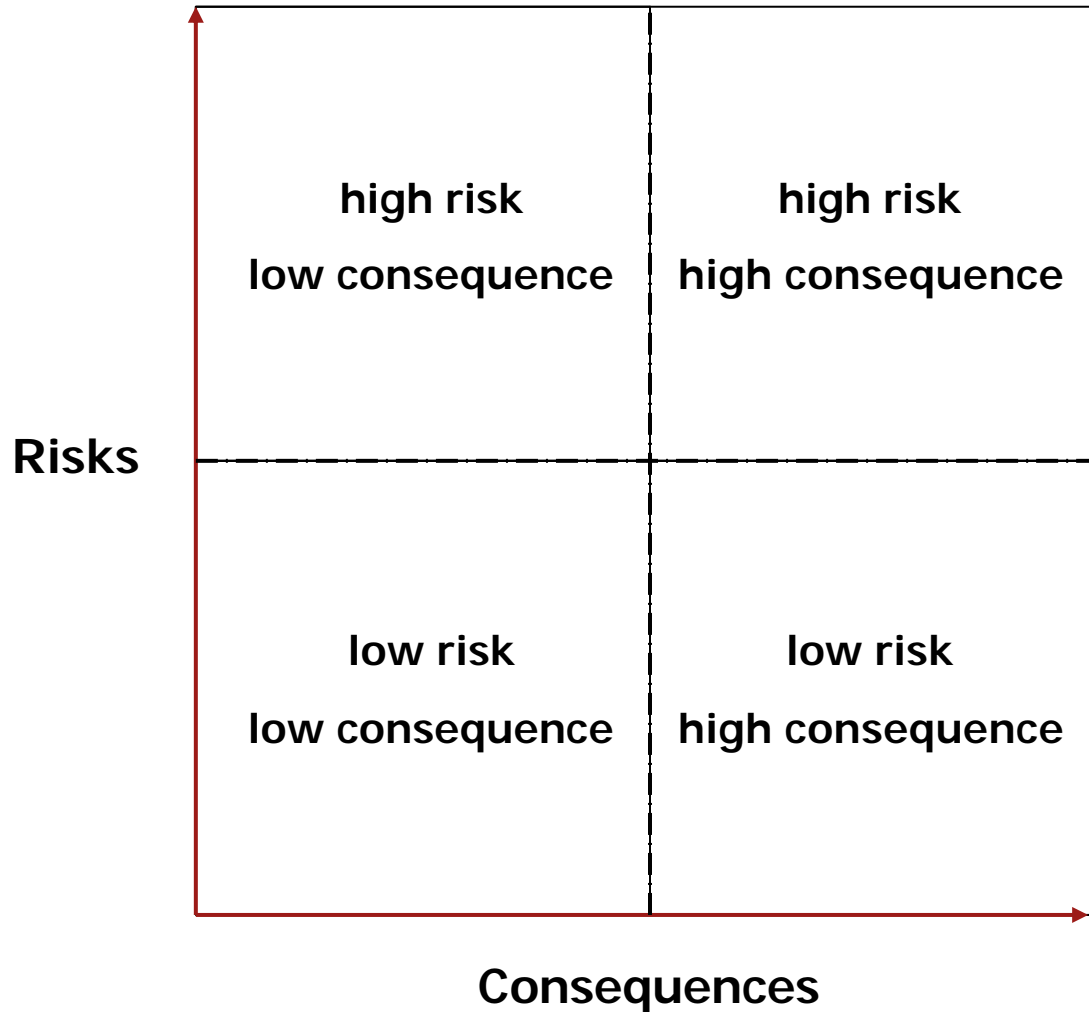
Risk Management

- **“We have no future because our present is too volatile. We have only risk management. The spinning of the given moment’s scenarios.”**

William Gibson, *Pattern Recognition* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 2003)

- **Risk consequence is hard to define in the digital environment**
 - **the volume is enormous so selection is essential**
 - **previously information sources self selected through format, durability and luck – digital conveys none of these advantages**
 - **selection assumes precognition of future significance**
- **Risk management is our most important tool to spin the moment’s scenarios**

Risk Management



Humans as digital preservation tools?

- Users value information not necessarily format
- Create a clear link between use and preservation
- Establish policy and strategic frameworks for future humans
- Select for digital preservation based on information goals not just system capacity
- In the digital domain, consequences are skewed and so are the costs of remedial action
- Remember information is a human construct – we define its value, its lifetime and its importance
- Humans are the ultimate tool of preservation: without our attention, value degrades fast

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