[Review of] I, Digital: Personal Collections in the Digital Era

Sarah Dorpinghaus
University of Kentucky, sarah.dorpinghaus@uky.edu

Click here to let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Follow this and additional works at: https://uknowledge.uky.edu/libraries_facpub

Part of the Archival Science Commons

Repository Citation
https://uknowledge.uky.edu/libraries_facpub/281
[Review of] I, Digital: Personal Collections in the Digital Era

Notes/Citation Information

DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University © 2016

The copyright holder has granted the permission for posting the article here.

This review is available at UKnowledge: https://uknowledge.uky.edu/libraries_facpub/281
of the archival process, through wikis and blogs about collections currently being processed.

*A Different Kind of Web* is not a step-by-step technical manual for setting up a Wordpress blog or Facebook presence; this book focuses on the bigger issues of new technology’s effect on the archival profession, such as authenticity and how to set goals and measure results for a successful Web 2.0 presence.

Angela Flenner
Digital Services Librarian
College of Charleston

*****


Archival repositories have faced the rising tide of digital preservation since the debut of personal computers in the early 1980s. But the growth of mobile devices, social media, and cloud storage has made archiving collections of contemporary individuals a daunting task. *I, Digital: Personal Collections in the Digital Era* edited by Christopher Lee addresses these challenges and offers basic guidelines for collecting and preserving digital personal papers. Ten authors answer the questions: Who else is facing these obstacles? What methods are currently in use? How will these shifts affect creators and users?

*I, Digital* is divided into three sections: Conceptual Foundations and Motivations, Specific Genres and Document Types, and Implications for Memory Institutions. The first essay, by Christopher Lee and Robert Capra, discusses the interdisciplinary aspects of curating and preserving digital collections. Fundamentals of electronic recordkeeping and personal information management are summarized and compared to current archival theory and practices to create a framework for collaboration. Adrian Cunningham continues the discussion by offering a modified set of principles for both curators and creators of digital personal collections. Originally intended for records
management purposes, these guidelines stress the importance of interoperability, technological neutrality, and providing context via metadata. The increasing amount of available and affordable storage for digital files has a significant impact on the way personal papers are evaluated and stored by creators. Catherine Marshall addresses the challenges and benefits of working with the large amounts of material accumulated over an individual’s lifetime. Her essay touches upon emulation, one of the most fascinating and complex methods of providing access to digital personal papers. Part 1 concludes with Sue McKemmish’s re-visititation of her 1996 paper “Evidence of Me…,” an examination of the relationship between personal papers and representations of the individual found in public digital environment. Included is an especially thought-provoking description of the Koorie Archiving System, which aims to create an “archival multiverse” where “control is shared and all parties involved can negotiate a meta-framework in which multiple perspectives, provenances, and rights in records coexist” (137).

Perhaps the most practical and useful section for those actively managing digital personal collections is Part 2: Specific Genres and Document Types. Christopher Lee’s second contribution focuses on appraising and collecting traces of an individual’s online activities. This data is often scattered across multiple interactive sites in the form of tags, comments, posts, and site-specific functions, such as “pins” or “likes.” Lee cautions archivists to gather documentation of both the exceptional and ubiquitous activities of an individual, and stresses the importance of preserving the context in which that data is found. Kristina Spurgin follows with a comprehensive examination of the challenges in managing digital collections of serious amateur photographers. Those not working with this particular format should still regard Spurgin’s essay, for the best practices presented are applicable to many other creators of voluminous digital records.

_1, Digital_ concludes with three essays written by professionals who have successfully incorporated born digital documents into normal workflows. Rachel Onuf and Thomas Hyry re-examine their 1997 article on managing electronic personal papers and reiterate Lee’s earlier point regarding the prevalence and wide distribution of digital personal data. They charge
archivists with the tasks of openly collecting digital content as well as traditional papers and learning the necessary skills for being a successful information manager in the digital age. The authors also identify the need for access systems with advance searching and data mining capabilities, examples of which are provided in the publication’s last two essays. Leslie Johnston details the University of Virginia’s User Collection Tool, which assists users in organizing their digital data; PageComber tool for gathering online information; and Collectus software for assembling digital objects for education, research, and presentation purposes. Susan Thomas follows with a summary of methods used by the University of Oxford’s Bodleian Library for managing digital personal papers, including the futureArch project, a digital forensics tool for capture and analysis of digital materials.

Archivists expecting a clear cut manual for managing digital personal collections will be left unsatisfied at the first pass through *I, Digital*. However, this publication does an excellent job at presenting the overarching considerations of collecting and preserving digital collections. Rather than establish specific and inflexible rules that will soon be outdated, the authors offer fundamental best practices that will be relevant to preserving digital content of all types for years to come. Those who truly digest and reflect upon the ideas presented in *I, Digital* will have a better sense of the correct route to successful preservation of digital personal collections. That road may not yet have signage or even be paved, but it is at the very least, a path leading in the right direction.

Sarah Dorpinghaus
Digital Projects Manager
University of Kentucky Libraries

*****