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17 February 2017

Dear Sir/Madam

I am writing in application to the position of 'digital archiving'.

I believe the role presents a unique opportunity to lead the sector, globally, and locally, where regional archives, and the rest of the archiving community will look upon 'the archive', as exemplar's. Where regional archives, and archival community can leverage our developments to create a strong world wide archive infrastructure.

Success for me means good information and records management from creation through to disposal, and beyond. As material reaches 'the archive', it's role becomes one of custodianship and one of accessibility and discovery; remixing, and reuse.

An archive by instinct and design must start from the roots upward, from the public office to the repository - it is here (and by leading the archival sector as well) that we can involve people in asking questions such as:

- What is trust and authenticity?
- How can I trust a digital record?
- How do I discover the information I want?
- What information links to and from the records that I am currently looking at?
- Given this information, how can I preserve it for future generations to use?

A second generation digital archive has a number of roles, some of which I discuss further below, but one that I believe we have an opportunity to embrace, especially as a government archive, is the embrace of the widest number of communities as possible - as other archival scientists have discussed better than me - to give voice to the silences in our communities and to seek justice for our society's minorities.

I believe we have an opportunity with digital to fulfil our traditional mandate within government, and at the same time, level access, and reuse of our collections for the widest possible audiences. There are numerous strategies, long- and short-term that we can use to do this.

While i consider the democratization of the archive to likely be the most disruptive of changes to our profession in the next two decades, there are other challenges we face, that the solution alone would represent a material change in our profession:

- Unparalleled access to our holdings as demonstrated by the Internet Archive's work in emulation (JSMESS), and levels of description - while we can develop this for the 'web archive' - this should not solely be the domain of the web archive

- Step-change increase in the volume of records transferred from government and the level of description given to them
- Federated and distributed discovery of archives, as already laid out in the 'Archives Inspire '15-19' strategy
- Finding, and making, and preserving the 'links' between digital records
- Extensibility, and flexibility of ways to reuse, and remix archive material
- Advocacy, and promotion of other's work based on archival material.
- Sustainable approaches toward digital preservation to promote trust and authenticity of archives

I believe I am in a unique position to lead 'the archive', as 'digtial archiving' at this point in time.

While my career in digital preservation ostensibly began at The National Archives, UK, in 2009, my capabilities were developed much earlier on with a programming, and digital humanities background. My time at The National Archives, UK, proved formative in understanding an important community of practitioners - archivists, librarians, and computer scientists - that remain key in the mission of the GLAM sector every day. The relationships developed then, I still maintain to this day. While I have not been able to remain an active part of the Digital Preservation Coalition in New Zealand, I am involved in the Open Preservation Foundation Document Interest Group, and am an active blogger on their website.

Since then I have honed my skills in digital preservation. On the one hand, I am a technician, and I develop tools each day to support:

- Bit-level preservation
- Link preservation
- Content and metadata analysis and extraction
- Format validation, with a view to delivery
- Discovery, and linking to other records

If one considers that digital records are required to be able to practice this work - then it becomes an easy jump from this research into supporting a range of information and records management activities at Archives New Zealand, from guidance about record creation, to appraisal, disposal, and eventually transfer. Regarding preservation and maintenance of digital records then I have also written digital preservation policy alongside colleagues which is shared between Archives New Zealand, and the National Library of New Zealand.

One of my more recent tools utilizes the output of DROID to try and support some of these functions, and has been developed in such a way as to help provide a lingua franca that can be used by archivists across the globe.

In my time at Archives New Zealand we have developed our digital transfer processes from scratch. As a central part of that work, I utilized, and shared agile techniques learned at The National Archives, UK, to help drive these initiatives through to the successful ingest of our first born-digital material - always with a pragmatic learning, with the knowledge that we could improve our techniques iteratively. We continue to share, and use these techniques. The freedom that the organisation has found working iteratively is that hard barriers notwithstanding, work always continues and we are always learning.

Archives New Zealand shares a digital preservation platform with The National Library New Zealand. The system adopted is Rosetta by ExLibris. The system provides us bit-level preservation. It also

enables us to spot a comparatively small number of digital preservation risks as material is submitted to the repository.

Gaps in the Rosetta-based system require the development of techniques for monitoring and tackling digital preservation risks. I pioneered the implementation of a registry of these risks using Trello to make sure we can keep track of work that still needs to be done. Work that can't be tackled now might range from the creation of new format identifiers in PRONOM which requires a certain amount of stakeholder management, through to fixing individual files that have failed validation in digital preservation tools such as JHOVE that we can identify byte-level changes for and write up resolution reports for.

Like our transfer work, developments are iterative. It is a goal of mine to further understand the extent of tools we require. The resources required to manage all the risks we might find in our digital material. And to develop appropriate measurements, and thusly goals, to understand the success of our digital preservation efforts. Our first goal, internally at least, is to educate colleagues on policy that supports preservation of archival material.

I have had the opportunity to work with stakeholders in two of the biggest preservation systems available to institutions such as The National Archives, UK, and Archives New Zealand - Tesella's Safety Deposit Box/Preservica, and ExLibris' Rosetta. As well as that I have continued to contribute to sources such as PRONOM, the Just Solve It Wiki; DROID, Siegfried, as well as creating my own digital preservation tools. I blog on a wide-range of subjects, but always with a view to developing the practices of the digital archiving and digital preservation community. I believe a lot of this work will serve me well in the development and delivery of 'the archives' digital strategy.

While I have lived in New Zealand I have enjoyed exploring the different towns and cultures available to me. I have enjoyed exploring the New Zealand countryside when I can make it out. I am a member of a Waiata (singing) group, and this has given me opportunity to develop my voice, as well as learn more about Maori culture using a method more accessible to me than perhaps the study of the language and tradition from books. I enjoy (attempting!) to learn French, and have been working on this using different techniques for a number of years. It remains my goal to spend a much longer period of time in France picking up the culture. I have an on/off relationship with learning Piano and I enjoy watching and participating in sports. A goal that I am committed to in 2017 is to cycle 30 kilometers in an hour on the local outdoor Velodrome in Wellington - my personal best is stuck at 29!

I am still seeking to find a good work/life balance, which can be challenging at times; I will often go the extra mile committing time to my work and this will put me in a good position to work outside the normal span of hours for your project.

Thank you in advance for considering my application, and I look forward to the potential to interview and hearing more as that time approaches.

Yours faithfully,
Ross Spencer