

Bridging the born digital gap: born digital archives and special collections across New Zealand

In 2016 an environmental scan of the current state of “born digital” archival and special collections across New Zealand was undertaken in the form of an online survey. “Born digital” refers to content created digitally or electronically, and without an analogue original or equivalent. Increasingly the material and content being collected by Aotearoa New Zealand cultural heritage organisations across the Gallery, Library, Archives, and Museum (GLAM) sector will be born digital. Collecting, managing, and preserving this born digital archival and special collections material creates new challenges and opportunities for New Zealand’s cultural heritage organisations. The survey uncovered data about how well prepared and positioned the GLAM sector is to collect and preserve these materials in memory institutions, and also measured our progress against international benchmarks.

Between 2010 and 2013 OCLC undertook two surveys of research libraries across North America and the United Kingdom. These surveys gathered information on the current state of research libraries. One of the key findings concerned the “widespread lack of basic infrastructure for collecting and managing born-digital materials” and that “management of born digital materials remains in its infancy.”¹ In response to the results of these surveys OCLC produced a series of short reports that defined terms, offered basic steps to managing born digital collections, and guidance for processing physical digital media.² These reports and other concerted efforts, such as the Society of American Archivists “Jump In” initiative and Digital Archives Specialist Certificate Program³ have galvanised action and in the past few years progress has been made in publishing guides, papers, reports, blogs, and other tools to assist libraries and archives of all sizes gain a better handle on their born digital collections. The New Zealand survey was inspired and influenced by the OCLC surveys, but looked specifically at born digital materials in New Zealand cultural institutions. Rather than limiting ourselves to research libraries, the survey was sent out to all memory institutions across the Gallery, Library, Museum, and Archive (GLAM) sector.

This paper reports on the survey findings. Current levels of born digital collecting, expected future collecting levels, and the general preparedness to collect, manage, and preserve born digital collections in New Zealand are reported. Details about the current state of staffing, infrastructure, descriptive and processing practices, and access to collections are also documented. This paper defines some of the key areas for improvement identified by the survey. The results of the survey suggest gaps in current professional skills and training, and those needed to collect and care for born digital collections.

Keywords *born digital archives, digital preservation, collecting, professional training and development*

¹ OCLC Research, *Survey of Special Collections and Archives in US and Canada*, <http://www.oclc.org/research/themes/research-collections/hiddencollections.html>, OCLC Research, *Survey of Special Collections and Archives in the United Kingdom and Ireland*, <http://www.oclc.org/research/publications/library/2013/2013-01r.html>.

² OCLC Research and Ricky Erway, *Demystifying Born Digital Reports*, <http://www.oclc.org/research/publications/library/born-digital-reports.html>.

³ “Jump In Initiative,” Society of American Archivists, <http://www2.archivists.org/groups/manuscript-repositories-section/jump-in-initiative>. “Digital Archives Specialist (DAS) Curriculum and Certificate Program,” Society of American Archivists, <http://www2.archivists.org/prof-education/das>.