

## THE DIGITAL CONTINUUM: FROM CREATION TO PROTECTION OF CONTENT

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This paper argues that national libraries should provide leadership to their national communities over the whole continuum of content-related activities, from the creation of content, through various systems for preserving it and making it accessible, to its long-term and sustainable protection.

The author notes that all national libraries have a formal mandate (expressed in various ways, in many cases by an Act of Parliament) to collect and preserve content and make it accessible. Formal mandates, however, require interpretation to keep them up to date with the realities of the digital era.

Some of the key issues: are the difficulty of capturing content especially from informal sources, the increasing convergence among national collecting institutions, the need for strategies to confront the risks of 'digital amnesia', and the need to make a convincing case to national authorities for a full appreciation of the economic and cultural value of information assets.

The author argues that national libraries should use their leadership position actively to encourage the development of policies and applications for the creation, discovery, access and use (and re-use) of content at all levels, with a particular emphasis on citizen-created content, taking full advantage of the power of social networking and the increasing take-up of broadband by the community. She cites two recent examples of collaborative initiatives developed by the National Library of New Zealand - the *Aotearoa People's Network* (providing free, fast and facilitated access to digital tools to enable communities to deposit content into local and national repositories through their public library), and *Digital New Zealand* (an innovative collaborative programme that aims to help make New Zealand digital content easier to find, share and use).

The author goes on to argue that it is an essential role of a national library to contribute to the long-term protection and accessibility of a country's content assets, particularly those which are vital elements of its cultural heritage, particularly ones as potentially vulnerable as digital assets. New Zealand's new 'National Digital Heritage Archive' is cited as one solution based on a robust business model and innovative software tools.

The author notes that this essential ‘contribution’ may take different forms, and be more or less interventionist, depending on the mandate of the national library and those of other stakeholders in different national jurisdictions.

Collaboration among national-level collecting institutions in the information and culture sectors, and with other public- and private sector stakeholders, is essential for the long-term protection of digital content needed in a modern information economy. The author argues that this objective can be attained through collaborative national strategies for digital continuity.

**Key terms:**

national libraries; convergence; social networking; citizen-created content; digital archiving; access to information; information economy; digital continuity