CATALOGUING AND PRESERVING BORN-DIGITAL ITEMS

Born-digital content is becoming increasingly common in galleries, libraries, archives and museums. Put simply, born-digital items are digital works which are not copies of analogue documents. Whilst digitised files are digital copies of physical items in your collection, born-digital items exist only in the digital space.

Although we can't handle or package born-digital items, they still require similar collection management activities, including cataloguing. This information sheet advises on the differences and similarities between the documentation of a born-digital item and a physical item in your collection.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

It is a good idea to familiarise yourself with processes related to managing born-digital items. You can find several excellent resources which explain the acquiring, preserving and maintaining born-digital items listed in the **Further Resources** section at the end of this information sheet.

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In many ways, a born-digital item can be catalogued in the same manner as a physical item. Other fields might require different information:

ITEM TYPE

You can identify an Item Type for your born-digital item in the same way you would for a physical item. For an electronic document, select **Document**, or for an oral history recording, select Audio.

TITLE

Born-digital files will have file names given by their creators, in this way a file name such as "Family_Photographs_2017" is equivalent to "The Man from Snowy River." It is important to record this information as it was given by the creator – even with spelling mistakes – just as we would with a painting, book, etc.

DATE OF CREATION

Digital files will often have more than one date. For example, you may have a date for Date Created or Date Last Modified. Use the **Provenance** section of Victorian Collections entries to record multiple dates, as this is important information regarding the life and iterations of a born-digital item.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Whilst born-digital items don't have materials and textures like a physical collection item, you can use the **Physical Description** and **Measurements** fields of Victorian Collections to record file specifications such as height, width, pixels per inch and file format.

These are important details about the properties of your digital file. You can see these details by opening the Properties window after right-clicking your born-digital file. To protect against loss from software and hardware obsolescence, also record any other relevant textual or image content listed in the file's Properties window.

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MEDIA UPLOAD

At the point of acquisition, you may have converted your born-digital files into 'lossless' compression file types for digital preservation. If not, ensure that you create the appropriate file types before uploading your media to Victorian Collections.

Consider uploading the original master file to Victorian Collections for preservation reasons in one of the following lossless file types: PDF/A (for text and documents), TIFF (for images), WAV (for audio), MJP2 or MPEG-4 (for video). You may also upload a compressed accessible version (JPG) suitable for easy user access and download.

CONDITION

For physical items we would record physical loss or instability in the **Condition** section of Victorian Collections, whereas for born-digital files we would instead document any digital corruption. This may be the case if a file opens but has missing content, so may be given a 'Poor' rating with an explanation, "Damaged digital file. Partially missing content."

LOCATION

You wouldn't throw away a physical collection item after uploading a digital surrogate to VC, so don't throw away your born-digital file either! Be sure to store your file on a desktop, a server or an external hard drive. You can record this directory path as the location of the born-digital item in the catalogue record. E.g. G:/Collection/Digital files/Born-digital/Master Copies/1245-2.pdf

Use meaningful file structure and naming conventions which connect the file to its information in the catalogue (i.e. use the identifier). You may also need to set access permissions on storage folders which contain Master files. You can manage access to a folder by right-clicking and opening the Properties window and going to the Security tab.

GLOSSARY

Born-digital: digital works which are not copies of analogue documents. This can include digital photographs, digital documents such as Word or PDF, electronic records such as emails or spreadsheets and harvested online content such as websites.

Lossless compression: means that data quality remains the same as a file is compressed. The file can also be decompressed to its original quality and size. Lossy compression on the other hand permanently removes data.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Collecting and Preserving Digital Materials, Federation of Australian Historical Societies, https://www.history.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Collecting-and-Preserving-Digital-Materials.pdf

Digital Preservation Handbook, Digital Preservation Coalition, https://www.dpconline.org/handbook/digital-preservation/preservation-issues

Victorian Collections is an initiative of Australian Museums and Galleries Association Victoria in partnership with Museums Victoria.
Victorian Collections is supported by the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria.

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