

Preserving State Government Digital Information Minnesota Historical Society

Developing a Business Case for Digital Preservation

Summary

Digital preservation is a continuous process and to be effective must be part of a routine. A business case is a way to make others aware of the issues associated with digital preservation and how their assets might be affected over the long-term if not addressed.

This paper provides a list of essential elements for a business case, discusses some of the issues to consider when developing a business case for digital preservation, and provides resources for additional information.

DISCLAIMER:

This white paper is a topical overview and is in no way intended to offer legal advice. Consult an attorney for assistance with specific concerns or for advice.

Any comments, corrections, or recommendations may be sent to the project team, care of:

Carol Kussmann
Collections Assistant, State Archives
Minnesota Historical Society
carol.kussmann@mnhs.org / 651.259.3262

Introduction

As more and more records with long-term value are ‘born digital’ the need for digital preservation business cases has multiplied. A business case is ‘a package of information, analysis, and recommendations’¹ that covers a particular issue. Business cases must be tailored to meet specific needs and address concerns of all stakeholders. A handful of state governments have put together a business case for digital preservation that can be used as models. Reviewing these business cases can be helpful, however variables will undoubtedly require you to modify the business case to address your particular situation and needs.

This document does not try to build a business case for you, but introduces the main elements of a strong business case. In addition, both general and specific issues to consider when developing

¹ Dawes, Sharon S. et al. *Making Smart IT Choices: Understanding Value and Risk in Government IT Investments*. Center for Technology in Government. April 2004.
<http://www.ctg.albany.edu/publications/guides/smartit2/smartit2.pdf>

your own business case on digital preservation are introduced; providing background information on what you may need to think about when developing your business case. This is followed by a resource list that includes links to sample business cases. Together these pieces provide you with a starting point and a path to follow when developing your own business case.

Essential Elements of a Business Case

A business case provides a roadmap to understanding a current situation and where you want to go in regards to a certain issue. The Center for Technology in Government lists the following items as essential elements of a strong business case²:

1. A brief, compelling, service-oriented problem statement.
2. A mission statement or vision of the future that addresses the problem.
3. A description of the specific objectives to be achieved.
4. A description and rationale for your preferred approach.
5. A statement of the benefits that address the concerns of all relevant stakeholders.
6. Measures for gauging improved performance or progress toward each objective.
7. A statement of the likely risks of your initiative and how they will be addressed.
8. A basic plan of work with a timeline and key milestones.
9. A project management plan and names and roles of key managers.
10. Alternatives considered and how they would or would not work.
11. Cost estimates and potential sources of funding.
12. Opposing arguments and your responses to them.

These elements should all be addressed and answered with your own situation in mind. Chapter Three of “Making Smart IT Choices: Understanding Value and Risk in Government IT Investments”³ by the Center for Technology in Government provides suggestions of data sources for each element as well as additional details, context, and examples for each. Chapter 4 in the same resource goes into more detail on how to present your business case to stakeholders and various audiences.

Things to Think About

Business cases are used to show the value of many initiatives. Listed below are some of the things to think about when developing a business case for digital preservation.

In general think about:

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³ Dawes, Sharon S. et al. *Making Smart IT Choices: Understanding Value and Risk in Government IT Investments*. Center for Technology in Government. April 2004.

<http://www.ctg.albany.edu/publications/guides/smartit2/smartit2.pdf>

Analyze, and then prioritize: When developing a business case, analyze your current environment, wants and needs, and then begin to set priorities. If you set priorities first, you might not be able to see the big picture. Priorities are allowed to change. Set your goals accordingly.

Appropriate solution to task and environment: Make sure that the solution you are promoting is appropriate for the task at hand and is a good fit for the current and future environment. You will be able to delve into this when you explore element number four (your chosen solution) and element number ten (alternative solutions).

Integration into routine: The easier the proposed solution is able to be integrated into current routines the more likely it will be accepted. Don't make major changes unless you already have buy-in from stakeholders. Think about timeframes. Think about who will be affected both internally and externally. Make sure to emphasize how changes will benefit everyone affected.

Cost control: Often business case proposals include an argument for controlling costs. How will the proposed idea prove to be a cost benefit over time? How will it save money or make the organization more efficient? Remember costs can be measured not only in dollars but in staff time and other resources. It is important to be able to make cost estimates as well as point to other sources of funding if available or necessary.

Use values: Use value is often a driver in digital preservation. People expect access. People expect easy access. People expect access now. As a content provider/creator, you must ensure that what people want is accessible now as well in the future. Often, the more people use something, the more value it has. Use value can make a strong case for long-term digital preservation.

Risk analysis: What are the risks involved in the proposal? How will these be addressed? (elements seven and twelve) In addition to possible risks in moving forward, what are the risks if this proposal is not adopted? What future challenges will be introduced? Who will be affected? How? What will the associated costs be?

Collaboration and partnership: Is there any opportunity to collaborate or partner with agencies or organizations that are in a similar position or share similar goals? Is there anyone that you can learn from? Who can you use as a successful example or model to follow?

Specific issues to consider for digital preservation are listed below. (Many of these might also serve as the catalyst of your digital preservation business case.)

Authentication: State government records are often consulted for official or legal purposes. Any digital preservation solution must also be able to address the authentication of the documents. Being able to prove that a digital record is authentic is essential for not only the public good but to avoid legal troubles.

Disaster recovery/Continuing of Operations Plan (COOP): Consider how digital preservation fits in with the organization's disaster recovery and continuing of operations plans. Are your digital records included in these plans? Will you need to access any digital records immediately after a disaster? Will you be able to?

Preservation equals access and use over time: Preservation ensures that records are available for access and use over a long period of time. Who uses your records, both internally and externally? Who would be affected if records were not preserved? Continued access reinforces the value of records.

Retention/disposition policies: The time period that records should be accessible depend on retention and disposition schedules. Systems should be aware of these schedules and be able to keep or dispose of records as required. Holding on to materials unnecessarily costs money, takes up valuable space, and may cause legal troubles.

Data sharing/interoperability: If looking to design or implement a new system, you need to see how the proposed system will fit in with current systems. Are there any data architecture requirements for your organization or agency? Does a centralized IT structure exist? At what level (state, county, local, or institution)? Is a goal to be able to share data across agencies or organizations? If so, you must have an understanding of all involved systems before you implement anything new. The more a system can interact with other systems, the more value you can get from the data. Sharing data also often increases value.

Public access/protection of non-public info: If sharing or providing 'public' access to data or records, how will you handle the protection of non-public information or data? What legal mandates or statutory requirements affect you? You need to be able to address these. There must be controls in place to restrict access to non-public data while providing access to public data.

Accountability/audit-ability: Making records available often increases accountability and audit-ability. As a government agency, being accountable may be a high priority.

Going green: Moving from paper to digital records sometimes has been based on a 'going green' initiative. Preserving born digital records will need to be addressed for continued access as part of this process.

In addition to exploring the above issues, the article "Digital Archiving From Fragmentation to Collaboration" is recommended as it addresses not only sample digital preservation case studies but the technological, social and political issues surrounding digital archiving in general. It provides a good framework for putting many different types of issues in context.

Most importantly, when developing a business case for digital preservation, having a complete understanding of the drivers for digital preservation builds a foundation from which to share your vision and move forward.

Resources

General

Blue Ribbon Task Force on Sustainable Digital Preservation and Access.

<http://brtf.sdsc.edu/>

The final report from the Blue Ribbon Task Force “Sustainable Economics for a Digital Planet: Ensuring Long-Term Access to Digital Information” published in February 2010 discusses issues surrounding the sustainability of digital preservation.

http://brtf.sdsc.edu/biblio/BRTF_Final_Report.pdf

Dawes, Sharon S. et al. *Making Smart IT Choices: Understanding Value and Risk in Government IT Investments*. Center for Technology in Government. April 2004.

<http://www.ctg.albany.edu/publications/guides/smartit2/smartit2.pdf>

This document sets the stage with defining and describing the essential elements of a business case. The descriptions are followed by further explanations, and specific examples making it easy to understand and follow along. Practical advice for working with diverse audiences is given as well as stressing the importance of identifying and understanding your various audiences and stakeholders. Focus on chapters three and four of this resource as these are the ones that discuss how to prepare and present a business case.

Digital Preservation Coalition

<http://www.dpconline.org/>

Based in the United Kingdom, the Coalition has published reports and case studies on long-term digital preservation that address issues business cases cover.

Erpanet. *Business Models related to Digital Preservation*. Amsterdam. September 20-22, 2004.

http://www.erpanet.org/events/2004/amsterdam/Amsterdam_Report.pdf

Provides information on preservation issues and business models within the public and cultural heritage sectors. Financial issues are discussed as well as relating practical experience to specific business models.

GeoMAPP: Geospatial Multistate Archive and Preservation Partnership. *Geospatial Archiving Business Planning*. 2008-2011.

http://www.geomapp.net/publications_categories.htm

GeoMAPP is a National Digital Information and Infrastructure Preservation Program Project (NDIIPP) focused on the preservation of geospatial data. State partners have explored and created business cases specifically for GIS data. Currently the project websites have resources that include a template for completing a systems inventory, a PDF of a PowerPoint about business planning and getting stakeholder buy-in, a poster on building a business plan, and links to Utah's business cases. By the end of December 2011 they will also have some additional tools and resources available.

Business Case Examples

Dollar, Charles. *Digital Preservation Readiness Capability Maturity Model and Digital Preservation Readiness Balanced Scorecard; Digital Preservation Planning Project*. Delaware Division of Libraries and the Delaware Digital Preservation Steering Committee. August 3, 2007.

http://state.lib.de.us/For_Libraries/Planning/Digitization/Digitization%20Deliverable%20final%20Draft8-10-07_XX.pdf

Discusses the development of a digital preservation framework for the state of Delaware. This paper covers the topics of roles and responsibilities, policy, strategy, collaborative awareness, technological expertise, adoption of neutral open standard formats, storage management, planned media renewal, digital object integrity, digital object security, preservation metadata, and access of digital materials. Cost estimates are also discussed.

Office of Secretary of State, Georgia Archives. *Business Case for the Digital Archives of Georgia (DAG)*. August 2007.

http://sos.ga.gov/archives/who_are_we/rims/digital_History/documents/DAG_%20Business_Case_v2%201.pdf

Georgia's business case. Includes sections for an executive summary, business need/problem, project objectives, recommended solution, timeline, challenges, assumptions, benefits, and for risks and critical dependencies.

State of Utah. *Business Plan for Archival Preservation of Geospatial Data Resources*. December 30, 2008.

http://www.geomapp.net/docs/Utah_Business_Plan_Geospatial_%20Archive_2008.pdf

An example of a business case that specifically addresses geospatial data. The business case includes the following sections: an introduction, goals, program benefits, program requirements and costs, organizational approach, and implementation plan.

Utah Department of Administrative Services, Division of State Archives. *Electronic Records Management Business Case*.

http://www.geomapp.net/docs/ut_ERMBusinessCase.pdf

Includes goals, business drivers, challenges and issues, risks, recommendations and next steps with managing state electronic records.

Blogs and Podcasts

Future Proof – Protecting our digital future; A State Records initiative for the NSW Government.
<http://futureproof.records.nsw.gov.au/>

Discusses issues related to keeping government business of New South Wales running effectively and efficiently with the understanding that digital records must remain accessible and trustworthy over time.

JISC. *Podcast/Press release: Making the business case for digital preservation.* March 23, 2010.

<http://www.jisc.ac.uk/news/stories/2010/03/podcast102chrisrusbridge.aspx>

A press release and podcast about the Blue Ribbon Task Force’s “Sustainable Economics for a Digital Planet: Ensuring Long-Term Access to Digital Information”.