

Oral History in the Digital Age

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Abstract: Involvement in oral history spans many different groups - including oral historians, libraries, archives, and unknown future users – each with different and not always complimentary needs. The “Oral History in the Digital Age” project conducted by MATRIX at Michigan State University seeks to develop a set of best practices for digital oral history that can facilitate the collaboration and transfer of information between these different groups.

As part of this project I have undertaken a review of current best practices gathered from online articles and institutional guidelines. From these documents I compared and synthesized statements about digital video, such as which file formats were recommended for preservation. Additionally I noted the reasoning behind the recommendations. This was done with the intention of clarifying issues related to digital video.

As recording and storage costs decrease digital video will become more feasible and likely more common in oral history projects. However, standards for video are not as well established as they are for other media. It is important that informed discussions take place that can lead to best practices that are manageable for various groups. While my work only represents the first step in the “Oral History in the Digital Age” project, it should be useful for promoting these discussions.

About the author:

Steve Cherry is currently pursuing a Masters of Science in Information with a specialization in Archives and Records Management at the University of Michigan School of Information. He previously earned a Bachelors of Music from Wheaton College. This summer he worked at MATRIX, a digital humanities center at Michigan State University. He is interested in new media and digital archives.