

A Survey of United States Business Archives

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Methodology

For the purposes of this study, business archives were defined according to the Society of American Archivists (SAA) Glossary – a repository of “records created or received by a commercial enterprise in the course of operations and preserved for their enduring value.”

The survey was distributed via email through the SAA Archives and Archivist (A&A) listserv, as well as through the SAA Business Archives Section listserv and social media. It was also shared to various regional archival organization social media sites. It was open for responses from January 5, 2017 through February 17, 2017.

Questions were divided into three categories: 1) Information about the broader corporate entity; 2) Information about the archives department; and 3) Information about the collections. A final free response question asked respondents to share their greatest challenge. A complete list of questions can be found in Appendix A.

The survey was completed by 45 individuals. Two of these results were removed from the data for answering “No” to question 1, which asked respondents to answer yes or no whether they meet the definition of a business archive as defined for this study. Three companies had multiple submissions, so duplicates were removed and multiple responses consolidated. The data below includes responses from 40 unique business archives. Responding institutions are listed in Appendix B.

Of respondents who opened the survey, 39% completed it; the majority on a PC or laptop, with a handful completing it on a smart phone.

Respondents of this survey represent only a small fraction of business archives in the United States and are therefore not based on a significant enough sample size to draw broad conclusions about business archives in general. It is my hope they will be useful as a tool for benchmarking and perhaps directing further research.

Results

Section 1: Corporate Entity

The data collected in this section relates to the archives’ parent organizations.

The survey respondents fall into a variety of business segments with 51% split among the following: Insurance (13%), Technology (13%), Manufacturing (10%), Finance (8%), Food and Beverage (5%), Health and Beauty (3%). The remaining 49% identify as Other among the survey choices.



The majority of respondents (68%) have locations for their company outside the United States, with the remaining 32% having only domestic locations.

The businesses range in size from 4 to 500,000 employees globally.

The earliest business included in the survey dates to 1792 with the most recent having been established in 2006.

Section 2: Archival Unit

The data collected in this section relates to the archives department and its administration.

The units responding to the survey were founded between 1881 and 2016. 58% (23) of these were founded after 2000. Two respondents had no clear start date of record for their archives.

The respondents were overwhelmingly from small shops with 53% (21) reporting between 0 and 1.5 FTE. Only 18% (7) of respondents had 5 or more FTE. With 75% (30) staffed by permanent employees, business archives staffed by Contractors or Consultants are in the minority with only 5% (2). The remaining 20% (8) are staffed by a combination of permanent and contingent workers.

The archives departments report to a variety of units within the businesses. The most common reporting department is Marketing / Communications with 30% (12). Other responses included Executive / Board of Directors (17.5%/7); Information Technology and Human Resources each with 10% (4); Legal / Compliance (5%/2); and Public Relations (2.5%/1). Ten respondents (25%) identified their reporting department as Other. Among these were Records Management Departments, Libraries, and Strategy Departments.

Regarding the existence of records management functions, 25% (10) of the organizations report having no records management function. 20% (8) of the archives report being located in the same department as records management. The remainder reported records management operations in a different reporting chain where 30% (12) work closely with archives and 40% (8) do not have working relationships with the archives.

The most common form of social media platforms for posting archival content was Internally facing social media / Intranet. Of the public facing social media channels, the following were used by the different archives: Facebook (13%/5), Instagram (10%/4), Twitter (10%/4), YouTube (10%/4), LinkedIn (8%/3). Several respondents commented that though they do not post content directly, they provide it to other groups within the enterprise that do post on various public social media channels.

When asked about the use of an archives management system for collections holdings management, 33% (13) of respondents replied that they do not use one. Several in this group indicated that they are looking to purchase one in the near future.

The remaining 67% (27) indicate that they do use an archives management system. The following are the software systems named: Past Perfect Museum Software (10%/4); Access Databases (8%/3); 2 respondents each using ArchivesSpace, CuadraSTAR, Cumulus, InMagic, Proficio Re:Discovery; and 1 respondent each using ALEX, CollectiveAccess, Eloquent, Koha,



Minisis, Oracle Enterprise Content Management, Soutron Global, SharePoint, SydneyPlus, The Museum System, and Resource Mate.

A higher percentage of respondents report not having a Digital Asset Management System (DAMS) (43%/17). One respondent did not answer the question.

Of the 55% (22) that do have a DAMS, the only system being used by more than one company is SharePoint with 13% (5). Some SharePoint users also listed additional DAMS software that is in use. The rest of the tools listed here are each being used by one company: Adobe Bridge, Alfresco, Brandnext, CollectiveAccess, Connectwise, Cumulus, FileNet, HP Records Manager, InMagic, Knowvation, Minisis, Mojo, Open Asset, Open Text Media Management On Demand, Portfolio by Extensis, Re:Discovery, Oracle Enterprise Content Management, Veridian, Soutron Global, and Widen.

Related to the digitization of content, over half of the respondents (52.5%/21) have no digital preservation plan. 42.5% of respondents (17) have a digital preservation plan and 15% (6) of the respondents commented that they are either drafting a plan or have one that is in the nascent stages and not scalable for future growth.

Regarding the various archive's philosophies on digitization, the most common approach is digitize on demand with 60% (24) of respondents selecting this option. The least common approach was to digitize everything (2.5%/1).

Approximately half of the respondents expressed a strategy that was a combination of digitization on demand, anticipated reference value, and preservation needs (in-house or outsourced).

When asked about the storage facilities for their collections, 42.5% (17) of respondents report having temperature and humidity controlled storage space for their collections. Those with temperature control only make up 15% (6) and 2.5% (1) report having just humidity control. Those without environmental controls were divided into 2.5% (1) that report the uncontrolled conditions as inadequate and the remaining 32.5% (13) report uncontrolled conditions as adequate.

Section 3: Collections

The purpose of this section in the survey is to learn about the archival holdings at each repository.

The oldest collections date to the 1600s, but this is the outlier with most collections dating from the 20th and 21st centuries through the present (50%/20). Fourteen repositories (35%) have collections dating from the 19th century through the present.

The format of holdings across collections is fairly homogenous in most categories one would expect, particularly documents and digital photographs which are both held at 100% of respondents' repositories. The least common format types are digital video recordings and audio recordings (both analog and digital).



The chart below includes the breakdown of repositories holding the various format types as a percentage of survey respondents and then the total number.

Documents (Paper)	100%	40
Documents (Digital)	92.5%	37
Photographic materials (Prints, slides, negatives)	97.5%	39
Photographic materials (Digital)	100%	40
Audio recordings (Analog)	77.5%	31
Audio Recordings (Digital)	75%	30
Video recordings (Analog)	82.5%	33
Video recordings (Digital)	72.5%	29
Three-Dimensional Objects	85%	34

Only 65% (26) of respondents provided their approximate physical collection size in cubic footage. The responses ranged from 12 cubic feet to 50,000 cubic feet. 88.4% (23) of those that reported collection size had less than 10,000 cubic feet (many significantly less) with only 11.6% (3) reporting collections larger than that.

Only 62.5% (25) of respondents provided their approximate digital collection size in GB. The responses ranged from 2 GB to 90,000 GB (or 90 TB). More than half of respondents to this question (52%/13) have collections that are 500 GB or smaller. Only 5 repositories in this group (20%) had collections larger than 10,000 GB.

The majority of repositories in the survey (65%/26) reported an access policy of internal use only. Only 5% (2) report being open to the public with the remaining 30% (12) reporting slight variations, but mostly that they are internal use only with special exceptions available for public use on a case by case basis.

Challenges

The last question on the survey was a free-response prompt asking what the archivist's felt their greatest challenge was. Nearly all the respondents (95%/38) took the time to answer this question and though there was some variety in the answers, several themes emerged.

1) DIGITAL ISSUES

30% (12) of respondents mentioned challenges related to digital collections – everything from collection / acquisition to preservation and access.

2) STAFFING

20% (8) of respondents highlight issues related to the small size of their staff related to the work load.

3) RECORDS MANAGEMENT

22.5% (9) of respondents cite issues with records management – everything from there is no records management to issues working with records management to facilitate systematic transfer of records (both print and born-digital).

4) OUTREACH / AWARENESS / EDUCATION

25% (10) of respondents report frustrations related to lack of understanding about the archive's mission, potential business value, and collecting needs across the organization.



Conclusions

Though the sample size was relatively small, there are a few conclusions to be drawn from the survey.

1) ACCESS POLICIES

Nearly all the business archives are for internal use only with public use being much more of an exception than a rule.

2) SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media use is limited in the business archives included in this survey and often it is not the archives directly posting the content to various social media channels.

3) SHARED CHALLENGES

Despite being given free-range to describe their greatest challenge in their own words, the results had some striking similarities which are outlined above.

What recommendations can be drawn from the survey? The most valuable seem to be our shared challenges since they give us some specific areas on which to focus our energies moving forward. Despite our disparate businesses, software systems, and locations in the organization, it seems that there is an opportunity to collaborate on tackling some of these prevalent challenges across archives moving forward.



Appendix A: Questionnaire

Do you work in a business archive as defined by the SAA Glossary (a repository of “records created or received by a commercial enterprise in the course of operations and preserved for their enduring value.”)? If your answer is no, there is no need to continue the survey, but thank you for your interest.

Section 1: About the Business

- 1.1. Business name
- 1.2. Year established
- 1.3. Type of business
 - A. Finance
 - B. Health and Beauty
 - C. Education
 - D. Manufacturing
 - E. Technology
 - F. Insurance
 - G. Food and Beverage
 - H. Retail
 - I. Other
- 1.4. Number of employees (globally)
- 1.5. Does your company have locations outside of the United States?

Section 2: About Your Archive

- 2.1. Year established
- 2.2. Number of FTE staff
- 2.3. Are the staff in your archive:
 - A. Permanent employees
 - B. Contractors / Consultants
 - C. Combination
- 2.4. To what department does your archives report?
 - A. Legal / Compliance
 - B. Human Resources
 - C. Information Technology
 - D. Executive / Board of Directors
 - E. Marketing / Communications
 - F. Public Relations
 - G. Other
- 2.5. Which best describes records management operations at your company?
 - A. There is no records management function
 - B. Archives and records management are co-located in the same department
 - C. Archives and records management are in separate reporting chains, but work closely together
 - D. Archives and records management are in separate reporting chains, but do NOT work together
 - E. Other



2.6. Does your archive post content to any of the following social media platforms?

- A. Facebook
- B. Instagram
- C. Twitter
- D. Snapchat
- E. YouTube
- F. LinkedIn
- G. Internally facing social media / Intranet
- H. Do not use social media
- I. Other

2.7. Does your archive use an archive management system (a piece of software that allows for the management of collection holdings, print and/or digital). Examples include: Eloquent, Past Perfect Museum Software, or Access Databases.

2.7.1. If yes, what is the name of the software?

2.8. Do you have a digital asset management system (a piece of software that stores digital items and related metadata)?

2.8.1. If yes, what is the name of the software?

2.9. If your collection includes digital assets, do you have a digital preservation plan?

2.10. What is your archive's philosophy on digitization?

- A. Digitize everything
- B. Digitize on demand
- C. Digitize collections / groups of material in-house based on reference value
- D. Outsource digitization of collections/ groups of material based on reference value
- E. Digitize in-house based on preservation concerns
- F. Outsource digitization based on preservation concerns
- G. Other

2.10. Which of the following best describes your storage facilities for physical collections?

- A. Temperature controlled
- B. Humidity controlled
- C. Temperature and humidity controlled
- D. No dedicated climate control, but adequate
- E. No climate control; inadequate conditions
- F. Other

Section 3: About your collections

3.1. Date range for collection holdings (print and digital)

3.2. Which formats do you have in your collection? (Select all that apply.)

- A. Documents (Paper)
- B. Documents (Digital)
- C. Photographic materials (Print, slides, negatives)
- D. Photographic materials (Digital)
- E. Audio recordings (Analog)
- F. Audio recordings (Digital)



- G. Video recordings (Analog)
- H. Video recordings (Digital)
- I. Three-dimensional objects
- J. Other

3.3. Approximate collection size in cubic feet

3.4. Approximate collection size of digital holdings in GB

3.5. What is your access policy?

- A. Open to the public
- B. Internal use only
- C. Other

What would you describe as your biggest challenge?



Appendix B: Repositories included in results

AIG
American National
Amway
AT&T
Atlanta Housing Authority
Battelle
Brooklyn Navy Yard Development Corporation
Cargill, Incorporated
Carhartt, Inc.
Chubb
Citi
General Mills, Inc.
HarperCollins Publishers
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt
IBM
JM Family Enterprises
John C. Portman Jr. (Architect and Developer)
Marriott International
McDonough Innovations
McKinsey & Company
Meriplex
National Association of REALTORS®
Nationwide Insurance
Omya Inc
Red Wing Shoe Company
REG
Salt River Project
Sasaki
Schweitzer Engineering Laboratories, Inc
SM Energy
SSM Health
The Boeing Company
The Capital Group
The Christ Hospital Health Network
The J.M. Smucker Company
The MITRE Corporation
The Shubert Organization
The Vanguard Group
W. L. Gore & Associates, Inc.
Young Life

