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**Insuring Media Archives & Leveraging
Data Management as a Risk Reduction Solution**

by joshua ranger
senior consultant
audiovisual preservation solutions

Introduction

As digital distribution platforms and business models become more settled, it is becoming more apparent these days that owning or maintaining an asset is not enough. Organizations must also structure and maintain the associated metadata records in order to make full use of their materials. Unfortunately, the creation and enforcement of metadata guidelines is often de-prioritized within organizations, primarily due to the perceived cost outlays.

Within traditional research archives, there is still an academic debate over the creation of folder or box level records (one database record broadly describes a group of related assets) versus the creation of item level records (one database record for each object). A driving reason here is that record creation is resource heavy, so fewer, more general records will cost less and shift greater expenditure to researchers. Production oriented media collections derive their practices from the academic field, but they are also influenced by expediency – the drive is to create, edit, get out the door, and move onto the next production. There is little budgeted for in-process records creation, let alone for going back and completing or editing the skeleton records.

Defining the Problems

What organizations fail to acknowledge is that short-term cost savings can lead to long term profit loss. Poor data management means assets cannot be used. With each passing day, potential revenue generation is essentially ignored, and the potential for loss or the cost for getting a growing collection up to the level of usability increases. From a risk perspective, the lack of proper records or adherence to policies means the data that does exist may be more damaging to an organization under an e-discovery situation due to misrepresentation of the facts or difficulty in analyzing records. The discovery process is drawn out and, in the case of insurance claims, an organization may receive too little compensation or the insurer may end up paying out too much compensation. Whatever the result, the process of these non-verifiable asset claims, as Doherty and Muermann have pointed out[1], can lead to tension and strained relationships among brokers, insurers, and the insured.

In short, there are three primary problem areas when dealing with data management practices and the insuring of media collections:

1. Valutaion: The great distraction here is the argument over separating cultural value from object value, and how each of those impact monetary value. What should be considered is **use value** to the organization: Assets not provided baseline accessibility and maintenance are effectively devalued. Understanding usability – distribution, marketing, licensing, outreach, business culture development, etc. – will help provide the business case for implementing improved practices and help better define insurance needs.

2. Depth of Intellectual Control: Within media collections there is often a great deal of duplication of assets on different formats or in slightly different versions, or a great deal of production materials are never properly de-accessioned. More detailed records that document relationships among assets, scheduled events such as disposal, and copyright ownership will help determine which objects are essential or what means are available for remediation.

3. Claims Assessment: Non-verifiable asset collections pose monetary risks in payout and monetary risks in lost relationships. Working with clients on their data practices can be seen as a risk reduction strategy on all sides, including more efficient review of documentation and more efficient remediation.

[1]Doherty, Neil A. and Alexander Muermann. "Brokers and the Insurance of Non-Verifiable Losses." Accessed May 19, 2009 at http://www.aria.org/rts/proceedings/2005/Doherty%20Muermann%20-%20Brokers.pdf

Defining the Solutions

Organizational change is driven by business use scenarios which, often in the case of data management practices, are only realized after a catastrophic loss, lawsuit, or governmental audit that reveals the risks and weaknesses. An alternative here is for the insurer and insured to collaborate on preventative measures to help avoid costly and contentious claims processes.

1. Baseline Record Creation:

Consider defining "insurance ready" records and data management polices as determining risk factors. Communicate the cost benefits of reaching this baseline and potential incentivizations, including improved collection management and accessibility, greater use of assets for promotion and increasing budgets, and savings that result from lowered risks and more efficient future claims processing.

2. Auditing Database Records:

Consider reporting and auditing as periodic pre-loss activities. Monitoring the growth and makeup of a collection as well as the quality of record creation will give a better sense of the true size and potential cost of replacement and will identify potential weak points in the data management chain that will cause problems later. In case of loss, procedures should be in place to freeze data at the point of loss for extraction; gather documentation related to the acquisition, storage, and circulation of assets; and conduct interviews with all stakeholders participating in record creation and media use.

3. Risk Reduction Services:

Risk reduction for data loss begs the question of how valuable the strategies are if deployed for poor data. Every invalid record erroneously correlated to an asset equates to money that could have been saved. To help prevent this overspending while forming a closer relationship with the client, leverage your data management knowledge into an additional risk reduction service.

Next Steps

In our own experiences conducting or supporting claims assessments through database auditing, collection assessment, and remediation plan development, the AVPS team has seen firsthand how the high emotions / high stakes engendered by a loss can lead to moments of miscommunication, mistrust, and lingering bad feelings. From our point of view, the values upheld by archives – findability, usability, detailed and controlled documentation, and decision-making that looks toward long term persistence – are the same values that inform the business practices of long standing corporations. Investing in and following through on implementation of those values for archives / media collections and insurers will help bring financial value and strengthen business relationships for the future.