

Audiovisual Digitization: Meeting Best Practices

Planning to digitize your audiovisual materials? Don't just take them to any corner vendor! Follow these steps to meet best practices for an AV digitization project.

1. Locate all of your audiovisual materials.
Often you'll find things in unusual places or individual offices. Ask administrative and artistic staff to return AV to one main place, even if they need to check something out again for teaching or promotion.
2. Do a collection assessment.
Find a source for trustworthy preservation advice. The individual or team should be able to identify the kinds of AV media you have, evaluate the organizational system of identifying and tracking your media, and write a report that sets priorities for AV preservation, digitization, storage, and access. Heritage, preservation, and library organizations (including library schools and the DHC) can help connect you to qualified people able to conduct an assessment. A collection assessment can also help secure funding.
3. Gather consensus among your administrative, artistic, and governance personnel.
Share the assessment report and make sure that key personnel will commit to the process.
4. Create an inventory of AV materials using the [AV Metadata Template](http://www.danceheritage.org/artisttoolkit.html) (find under the "Digital Files" tab on Dance Heritage Coalition's Artist Legacy Toolkit at <http://www.danceheritage.org/artisttoolkit.html>).
Use recommended templates or spreadsheets that have fields for administrative, technical, and descriptive data. Your system should assign a unique number to each item; this is called item-level processing. Usually there should be two people working on the inventory: a content specialist like a former company dancer or administrative person who is familiar with the company's history and repertory and an archival specialist who can implement organizational systems and technical data logging. The inventory is essential to identifying original recordings and archival masters, and the metadata will help users search for specific items in an online access point.
5. (Optional) Engage a scholar or critic familiar with the artistic legacy to write a scholarly assessment.
This step can assist in identifying priorities for digitization and preservation, especially when digitization may be limited by funding. A scholarly assessment, along with the collection assessment, can help make the case when applying to funding opportunities.

6. Curate! Select and prioritize the tapes for digitization and preservation.
Not every video is worth digitizing. Copies from original formats and compilation videos should be weeded from original recordings that capture complete works. Focus your resources on preserving items important to your legacy and of good quality. Remember that the size of uncompressed preservation-quality digital files is 100 GB for an hour of analog video: the storage for these files requires special handling and significant power draw.
7. Plan a digital storage and file-managing system.
Before you choose a vendor, know what formats of digital file you will need to satisfy preservation and access needs. Best practices recommends uncompressed digital files in multiple locations for preservation, and then two access files (a “mezzanine” level that is suitable for broadcast or projection and a streamable-size access file for the web, sharing, and office use). Ask your vendor how your outputs will be delivered. If you can’t store the large preservation files yourself, see the next step.
8. Seek a long-term archival partnership with a formal repository.
If you have embraced preservation-quality digitization and have more than just a few tapes that merit this treatment, a suitable repository can safeguard your digital files for you. Depending on the significance of your artistic and cultural legacy, there are archives, museums, historical societies and other formal repositories that can take the responsibility of ensuring your digital files can be migrated as technology and standards change over time.
9. Set organizational standards for managing the digital files.
Once you receive your digital assets (congratulations!), ensure that a file-naming system and an access system are both implemented so that no files will be overwritten or otherwise damaged or deleted. Ensure that your system includes backups that are kept in more than a single location.

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