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Review of Protecting Your Library's Digital Sources: The Essential Guide to Planning and Preservation

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David Lodwick

PROTECTING YOUR LIBRARY'S DIGITAL SOURCES: THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO PLANNING AND PRESERVATION

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PROTECTING YOUR LIBRARY'S DIGITAL SOURCES: THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO PLANNING AND PRESERVATION. Miriam B. Kahn. *Chicago: American Library Association, 2004, 104 pp., ISBN 0-8389-0873-X.*

Almost all libraries now have digital sources. Electronic databases, online catalogs, scanned images, word processing files and Excel spreadsheets, ebooks, and websites all fall into this category. In fact, some libraries seem determined to do away with any sources that are not digital. Digital sources are susceptible to fire and flood – the same dangers that threaten books and magazines – but are subject to other hazards as well: accidental erasure, computer viruses and worms, power failures, and incompatibilities between data files and the hardware and/or software used to access the data. Miriam Kahn's new book, *Protecting Your Library's Digital Sources*, is an overview of various considerations that should be included when planning for the protection and preservation of digital information.

The book is divided into two sections: a 54-page text, followed by 30 pages of checklists. The text portion is divided into two sections as well. The first deals with disaster prevention and response planning for computers and data, with an emphasis on backing up data and being prepared to restore access to that data in the shortest possible time after a mishap or a full-blown catastrophe. Most libraries have been backing up their data for some time now, and there is little in this first section that is particularly new or eye-opening. Nonetheless, because of the importance of backups and disaster planning in general, another review is never a bad idea.

Redundancy is the goal of data backup, of course, but unfortunately there is too much redundancy in the first text section. For example, the definitions of hot, cold, and mobile recovery sites are set forth on page 13, and then offered up again on page 21. Still, the text contains plenty of sensible advice for planners, including media storage, insurance, and personnel tips.

The second text section moves on to the question of how to keep old data accessible on current systems; this is a problem that periodically yields new and unpleasant surprises. Ms. Kahn offers as an example the demise of the floppy disk drive. Years from now, will libraries be able to find a floppy drive when they want to retrieve data from a floppy disk? (This already is an issue with some obsolete formats). Meticulous documentation of digitization processes and a long-term commitment to staffing of digitization projects are necessary to ensure future access to digital sources.

The checklist section may be the most valuable portion of this book for library disaster response teams embarking on in-depth contingency planning sessions. The checklists are “guides for creating your own plans. They do not constitute a plan in and of themselves, but are the building blocks for one.” Who is in charge of the backups? Where are the tapes? Who is the insurance contact person? What is her phone number? How many computers are in the building? Do they share a standard software configuration? What is it? These are only a few of the questions that ideally will be answered, in writing, in advance of an actual disaster.

The book is indexed, and contains lists of organizations involved in preservation and data recovery, along with a bibliography.

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