Microforms in a Digital World

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MICROFORMS IN A DIGITAL WORLD

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Microforms were developed in this country primarily to help the government convert print documents into a smaller format to save space, and to pass secret documents covertly. It was the thirties and many things were happening that were a prelude to WWII. In those days, the microfilm was developed on an acetate base that was guaranteed to last 50 years. This kind of film was produced until the mid to late seventies, so there is some film that is beginning its deterioration process, and some that is well into the decay. Microfiche has always been on a polyester base, so we are not worrying about its stability like the microfilm. The more stable product of polyester is estimated to last for approximately three hundred years. The present day product has been continuously produced on this base for many years and companies will help you convert your acetate products to polyester for a small fee.

In academic libraries especially, we find microfilm being used as a primary source of journals, newspapers, and some documents, especially as a preservation source for older materials. It is standard practice to film current titles and issues as they appear in libraries, so that the print format can be replaced by microfilm for longer life. Many academic libraries do not even purchase the original print, but opt for the microfilm either six months or a year after the original production. The advantages are better reproduction, better preservation, no gaps in issues or other materials, and minimal costs for housing. We recently purchased a title on microfilm at a much reduced cost to be used by faculty doing research. The price for five years of the film was equivalent to one year of the print. The faculty are pleased with the result of the purchase and we have placed the title on a microfilm standing order, and receive it every year.

Libraries also purchase microfilm as a secondary or back-up source for journals, newspapers, and documents. Our library tries to have at least two sources of our titles, so that no matter what the local problems are, we have a method for retrieving the information. If the internet or databases go down, we still have the microfilm to back us up. Likewise, if print sources are stolen or damaged, we still have the microfilm to view. We lose very few reels of film compared to print issues, and replacement is far easier and faster. Since a lot of reference work is for students and faculty around the world (off campus), we find that scanning the film for electronic delivery is a primary option and easier than the print source. There is minimal equipment required and better reproduction through a faster delivery system. Here again, we are able to save more money and time, as well as personnel.

Previously, we mentioned the deterioration of acetate film. I showed an acidity testing strip and how to use it, so that the degree of deterioration can be determined more scientifically. This procedure allows the microfilm specialist an easier way to gauge the exact urgency for replacement. The first characteristic is the smell of vinegar (indicating acidity). I subsequently discovered that NA Publishing Company offered a program of replacement at \$18.50 per reel plus shipping. Turn around time is two weeks from send out to return of the polyester product. Our shelving units are in an archway structure near the front doors of our library. I purchased drying packets for placement in the units from Desiccare, Inc., so that we can reduce the moisture level. We have been able to sustain a moisture level below or just at 30%. If the level of moisture rises to 40% or

more, it is recommended to contact those who monitor that element and alert them. We are in the process of wrapping each reel of film with an acid free strip so that air pockets do not develop and create areas where moisture and warmth will create mold. As I create an inventory of the film, I am adding preservation information about the format and production year for future librarians. This new process should give us all the information we need to deal with the preservation. The university has instituted automatic readouts for heat and humidity in the buildings, and we will build/buy a unit that will allow us to clean the film and fiche over the years as needed. If you are handling the microform often, it is best to use white cotton gloves to reduce oily residue on the film.

NA Publishing has developed a product called digital microfilm where the film is used to instantly show a digital product online as you request it. There are capabilities of "cut and paste" of specific articles from newspapers into a new document for sending to another receiving point (computer at home, lab, laptop, or on site). There is a problem of searching the material and one must know the full citation to find the article. This will probably be enhanced over the next couple of years. When it comes to reproduction methods, it is as easy to change digital into microfilm as it is to change microfilm into digital product. This has worked well for our needs in providing information to our Worldwide Campus in our 24/7 reference.

We have a format (microform) developed for saving space, which still continues to be very useful as a means to save information over long periods of time. It has proven to be easy to use, easy to preserve, less costly to keep and purchase, and more dependable for the library and patrons. It has a lifespan of three hundred years and is easy to replace if necessary, as well as duplicate for fast delivery. This is a stable format with futuristic possibilities. What could be better?