

Temporary Archiving

We propose a cost-effective two-stage solution for archiving low-quality formats such as DVD and VHS, if the direct transfer to lossless video is currently too expensive.

If funds are short, consider migrating VHS and DVD to DV¹ (Digital Video) format, using a PC or MAC with a professional video capture card², turning the information into files stored on the computer. The card takes the analogue signal from the VHS and converts into a digital signal. The standard DV bitrate is 25 megabits/sec³. The new digital files can then be stored until the DV format starts to become obsolete. At that time (after 2015? 2020?) it will almost certainly be necessary to go from DV to uncompressed video, in order to “re-encode” into whatever production and access formats are required to meet new user requirements⁴. When the DV is uncompressed, **the result should be saved** as the new uncompressed master. It won't be any better quality than the DV it came from, but it will allow all future encodings, forever, to originate from an unencoded master.

There will still be a preservation problem of obsolescence of the file format that holds the uncompressed video (AVI or whatever will become superceded), but that problem should be solved by straightforward ‘wrapper to wrapper’ migration.

Pros

- DV is easy to acquire and is currently a widely-supported format.
- The process is straightforward, with a single operational point.
- Engaging with the transformation of physical objects into files promotes archival awareness of the need for constant migration; moving from the analogue to the digital age.
- Buys time for information held on low quality formats that are becoming obsolete/unstable, especially if the collection is sizeable.

Cons (Risks)

- Organisational funding must allow for a phased, two-stage approach. Otherwise there is a risk of not being able to proceed past stage one.

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¹ Broadcasters with the required technology may prefer 25 Mb/s MPEG-II ‘long-GOP’, or 50 Mb/s ‘I-frame only’ MPEG-II (also called 50i) or 50 Mb/s DVC-PRO. All four options are sufficiently higher in quality than VHS or domestic DVD, to capture those low quality signals without visible artefacts.

² A list of professional capture cards is here:

<http://wiki.prestospace.org/pmwiki.php?n=Main.TechRef#Equipment>

³ 25 megabits/sec is roughly 12 gigabytes/hour.

⁴ There may be software to move directly from DV to a new compressed format, but experience has shown such direct migrations between encoded formats to be, in general, sub-optimal – though it all depends on the mathematical relationship between DV encoding and ‘whatever comes next’..