

Press release

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The National Archives and Microsoft join forces to Preserve the UK's Digital Heritage

Unique relationship ensures sustainability of digital information for future generations of Britons

Microsoft and The National Archives today announced a Memorandum of Understanding (M.O.U) ensuring preservation of the nation's digital records from the past, present and into the future. Microsoft will make available to The National Archives a system, which combines previous versions of Windows and Office, to help solve problems of managing historical records based on legacy Microsoft Office formats. The ongoing collaboration will also see The National Archives further its innovative approach to sustaining the nation's digital heritage, by contributing their expertise and insight in digital preservation towards the development of future releases of Microsoft products. Having addressed some of the key format sustainability issues through the implementation of the Ecma Open XML format in its latest products, the announcement represents a further step in Microsoft's commitment to digital preservation.

The National Archives is at the heart of information policy, setting standards and supporting innovation in information and records management across the UK. As the UK Government's official archive, it also contains 900 years of the nation's history. Traditionally, these records were produced and stored on paper and physical preservation was relatively straightforward. However, the exponential growth of digital information has created new preservation challenges. Moreover, in some instances, applications that support older file formats are no longer commercially available. For The National Archives, today, this information represents 580 terabytes of data, the equivalent of 580 thousand encyclopaedias.

Natalie Ceeney, Chief Executive of The National Archives, said: "The ephemeral nature of digital information, resulting from the rapid evolution of technology, is a major challenge

facing government and our society today. Unless we take action, we face the certainty of losing years of critical knowledge. That's why it is essential that The National Archives, together with the IT industry, address the challenge now. Our relationship with Microsoft supports our work in digital preservation and gives us many key tools to access the legacy of government for years to come.”

Today's announcement sees Microsoft provide The National Archives with access to previous versions of Microsoft's Windows operating systems and Office applications powered by Microsoft Virtual PC 2007. Virtual PC 2007 enables people to run multiple operating systems at the same time on the same computer. This allows The National Archives to configure any combination of Windows and Office from one PC, thereby allowing access to practically any document based on legacy Microsoft file formats. It is estimated that The National Archives will have to manage many terabytes of data in these formats.

The project will enable staff and visitors at the National Archives to view historical information based on legacy formats in the way the author intended. In addition, The National Archives will be able to improve the accessibility of these documents by converting this information to new, open file formats.

Gordon Frazer, Managing Director UK and Vice President Microsoft International said: “Microsoft took the step to implement XML-based file formats that unlock data in documents, allowing them to be archived, restructured, aggregated and re-used in new and dynamic ways. As a result, the latest releases of Office use open-standard file formats – Open XML. Our M.O.U. with The National Archives will go beyond this and ensure that decisions we make in future products will meet the rigorous requirements of digital preservation. More importantly, ensure that future generations do not suffer the fate of a digital dark age.”

Adam Farquhar, Head of eArchitecture at the British Library and co-chair of the Office OpenXML standards committee said: "Microsoft has shown considerable initiative working with The National Archives, The British Library and others to increase our ability to ensure access to today's digital information tomorrow. This announcement represents an important step and shows the sort of value that effective collaboration between public and private organisations can bring to the challenge of preserving our nation's heritage."

About Microsoft

Founded in 1975, Microsoft (Nasdaq "MSFT") is the worldwide leader in software, services and Internet technologies for personal and business computing. The company offers a wide range of products and services designed to empower people through great software - any time, any place and on any device.

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The National Archives, www.nationalarchives.gov.uk, is a government department; and also an executive agency of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). The National Archives brings together the Public Record Office, Historical Manuscripts Commission, the Office of Public Sector Information and Her Majesty's Stationery Office. See also www.opsi.gov.uk

The National Archives is at the heart of information policy – setting standards and supporting innovation in information and records management across the UK, and providing a practical framework of best practice for opening up and encouraging the re-use of public sector information. This work helps inform today's decisions and ensure that they become tomorrow's permanent record.

The National Archives is also the UK government's official archive, containing 900 years of history from Domesday Book to the present, with records ranging from parchment and paper scrolls through to recently created digital files and archived websites. Increasingly, these records are being put online, making them universally accessible.

The vision of The National Archives is to:

- Lead and transform information management
- Guarantee the survival of today's information for tomorrow
- Bring history to life for everyone

About the British Library

The British Library is the national library of the United Kingdom. It provides world class information services to the academic, business, research and scientific communities and offers unparalleled access to the world's largest and most comprehensive research collection. The British Library's collections include 150 million items from every era of written human history beginning with Chinese oracle bones dating from 300 BC, right up to the latest e-journals. Further information is available on the Library's website at www.bl.uk

For further information about this press release, please contact:

Satyen Dayal

020 7344 1525

Satyen.dayal@edelman.com

For information on Microsoft Ltd, please contact:

The Microsoft Press Centre

Tel: 0870 20 77377, lines are open 9.00am to 6.00pm Monday to Friday

Fax: 0870 20 77329

Email: ukprteam@microsoft.com/ www.microsoft.com/uk/press

For information on The National Archives, please contact:

Tim Matthews

Press Office, The National Archives

020 8392 5277

tim.matthews@nationalarchives.gov.uk

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