
Developing a library off-air recording service



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As a subject librarian for journalism at the University of Lincoln, I find it not only essential to produce off-air recordings of TV or radio programmes, but to review the curriculum relevance of our audiovisual (AV) collection. When the AV collection was reviewed earlier in 2008 many issues arose, necessitating the possibility to rejuvenate the collection and address the consideration that students prefer media material to be available in modern format. Simply by browsing other university websites it became apparent that the library could revitalise its off-air recording service by offering in-house departmental request forms, contact details and procedures. One of the most comprehensive examples is Bournemouth University's 2008 off-air request webpage, which contains useful sections for student and staff off-air recording requests, programmes requested after broadcast, off-air news and finding programmes.¹ Rejuvenating the collection produced a two-fold summer project in creating an autonomous off-air recording service and transferring off-air recorded videos to DVD format.

The initial part of the project involved setting up an off-air recording facility in the library. Options for obtaining off-air recordings currently involve the purchase of educational videos from the Open University's (2008) off-air recording scheme and membership of the British Universities Film and Video Council (BUFVC).² BUFVC membership enables the library to purchase up to 12 copies of 'formerly broadcast television selected from the Off-Air Recording from BBC1, BBC2, BBC3, BBC 4, ITV1, Channel Four and Five', with an archive stretching back to June 1998. While both of these services are extremely worthwhile they are ultimately limited when compared to a fully established off-air recording facility that responds to staff and student requests with the ability to pre-record digital programmes. A possible solution arrived when the university purchased a Freeview

facility for the Lincoln campus library, meaning that we could autonomously record radio and TV programmes under the Educational Recording Agency (ERA) licence agreement.³

The next stage elicited a few considerations such as the kind of service we could offer, how many library staff to involve, the production of relevant staff guides, training issues and whether the off-air service could be extended to staff and students. We opted for a restricted service to limit the off-air service to in-house provision, because of workload constraints. Such an inexpensive solution meant that recording digital programmes was simple, and gave us the idea to develop a fresh curriculum-relevant off-air collection. Consequently, an off-air group was established, staff were trained in recording and burning programmes onto DVD and re-cataloguing transferred DVDs, while procedures for deleting unwanted videos were drafted. To support the project a contingency bid for appropriate funding was submitted on the basis of initially transferring 500 videos. Under copyright law, it was only possible to transfer off-air recordings that the library had produced. As videos could only be transferred in real time, I submitted a plan of how long it would take to transfer these, which amounted to a substantial summer project, with three machines in operation to transfer videos to DVD. Auditing the audiovisual collection meant deleting obsolete videos, ensuring copyright compliance and transferring curriculum-relevant off-air videos to DVD. We also deleted obsolete purchased videos, which could not be transferred because of copyright regulations. Because much of the audiovisual collection was out of date and contained worn videotape, hundreds of videos were deleted. While manufacturers of CDs/DVDs suggest that they should last for a hundred years, other sources suggest that CDs and DVDs are not as durable as they claim.⁴ Videotape obviously deteriorates after wear and tear, but also due to changes in room temperature and magnetic interference, with their usual lifespan lasting only ten to fifteen years. The project was also a salvage operation and many hundreds of videos were deleted because they had deteriorated and were unwatchable.

To facilitate the project we purchased equipment such as TVs, video players, DVD recorders, DVDs and DVD cases. In some cases, programmes had been recorded over, parts were missing or tapes had been irretrievably damaged. In practice, the transfer of videos to DVD was a start-stop process, as most programmes lasted for about an hour

and could only be transferred in real time, so one machine could transfer seven or eight videos to DVD per day. Online development included creating an intranet page to include a request page for off-air recordings, copyright information and appropriate web links.

To date, the benefits of the off-air project include obtaining highly sought-after shelf space, copyright compliance, a quality audit of the audiovisual collection, student satisfaction and the creation of a student-friendly format since VHS is becoming less popular because it may be perceived as outmoded. In an increasingly transformative era of learning landscapes, the next step for the transferred audiovisual collection is to stream the DVDs onto the university network to create greater study space in the library.⁵

REFERENCES

- 1 Bournemouth University, 'Off-air recording requests' (2008), available at http://www.bournemouth.ac.uk/library/using_the_library/bufvc.html (accessed 30 April 2008)
- 2 British Universities Film and Video Council, 'General benefits of BUFVC membership' (2008), available at http://www.bufvc.ac.uk/aboutus/membership_benefits.html (accessed 30 April 2008)
- 3 Under the agreement we can record television programmes for educational purposes (BBC, ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5 and Freeview channels).
- 4 See Tom Bishop, 'Is music safe on compact disc?' (2004), available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/3940669.stm> (accessed 30 April 2008), and C. Szejnmann, 'How long should a DVD last? Ask Jack', Guardian Unlimited blog, available at http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/askjack/2008/05/how_long_should_a_dvd_last.html (accessed 13 May 2008).
- 5 Angela Thody, 'Learning landscapes for universities: mapping the field' (2008), unpublished