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Review of Becoming a Trusted Digital Repository, Module 8 of Trends in Archives Practice

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Review of Review of *Becoming a Trusted Digital Repository*, Module 8 of Trends in Archives Practice

By Steve Marks, with an Introduction by Bruce I. Ambacher and Edited by Michael J. Shallcross. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2015. 96 pp. Softcover. \$29.99. ISBN: 1-931666-84-9. PDF. \$14.99. ISBN: 1-931666-85-7. EPUB. \$14.99. ISBN: 1-931666-86-5

Becoming a Trusted Digital Repository is Module 8 in the new Society of American Archivists series, Trends in Archives Practice. In the words of the publisher, the goal of the series is to “build agile, user-centered resources” for archivists engaged in the practical application of archival principles and best practices. Earlier modules explore the themes of “Archival Arrangement and Description” and “Rights in the Digital Era.” Like its predecessors, Module 8 is a thin volume packed with useful, clearly articulated information and an extensive list of resources. Module 8’s topic, “Becoming a Trusted Digital Repository,” presents a section-by-section summary, analysis, and explanation of ISO 16363, the Audit and Certification of Trustworthy Digital Repositories, which became an International Standard governing digital preservation in 2012. Module 8 is a user-friendly, highly readable companion to ISO 16363, demystifying what many readers may consider a highly technical, intimidating standard.

The module begins with an Introduction by Bruce Ambacher, one of the architects of the standard, who provides a historical perspective that contextualizes and grounds ISO 16363 in today’s rapidly changing digital preservation landscape. The Introduction also clarifies the difference between a *Trusted Repositories Audit and Certification* (TRAC) Audit and an ISO 16363 Audit, and shares the results of six recent test audits based on the standard’s parameters. In addition to this valuable information, Ambacher reflects on the continued governance and sustainability of the standard, setting the stage for the module proper. The module author, Steve Marks, is well positioned to guide readers through the intricacies of the standard. Marks, who serves as digital preservation librarian at the University of Toronto, draws firsthand experience from a CRL audit of Scholars Portal (a shared repository of the Ontario Council of University Libraries) based on TRAC, a precursor to ISO 16363.

Early in the work, Marks describes the module as a “tour guide” designed to help the reader navigate and understand the sometimes obscure, sometimes austere content of the standard. The analogy is a good one. The structure of the module parallels the three main sections of the standard: 3. Organization Infrastructure, 4. Digital Object Management, and 5. Infrastructure and Security Risk (the first two sections are largely about the standard’s history and groundwork). The module maintains the sectional and sub-sectional structure (e.g. 3.3.5) of ISO 16363

throughout its central chapters for easy cross-referencing. The stated goal of the module is to “unpack the dense presentation of the standard and tie it to current archival practice, making it more relevant to everyday work” (p. 3). The text progresses through the critical processes covered by the standard, including ingest, access, data management, archival storage, security, policy, and institutional viability, always with an eye toward the central tenets of accountability and transparency.

Throughout, Marks expands on the standard’s requirement statements in language and terminology that archival professionals will understand. He takes the reader step-by-step through the actions required to satisfy each requirement, providing insider advice, policy examples, and numerous resources through footnotes and a dedicated resource appendix. For example, when discussing the granular requirements for documenting the process of acquiring Preservation Description Information (4.2.6), the author writes: “While it sounds like a lot of information to track, it is important to remember that much of this metadata should have been accumulated (and documented) in the course of your transfer, accession, and ingest procedures” (p. 37). Similarly helpful advice accompanies the discussion of integrity measurements (3.3.5): “Internal records of your integrity checks may document failures in which files were damaged or corrupted and needed to be restored. You do not need to send this information to your Designated Community, but it should be maintained as part of your internal processes for remaining accountable for your content” (p. 20). This type of guidance should prove invaluable for readers confronted with the sometimes daunting requirements of the standard. What’s more, Marks draws connections between the standard’s main sections, making sense of required compliance actions that may appear redundant. A typical cross-sectional guidepost: “your answer there will likely be restated here.”

The module frames the inner, meaty chapters on the requirements of the standard with brisk, informative reference and conclusive material. The author provides a list of the specialized terminology employed by ISO 16363 (mostly deriving from the Open Archival Information System), clearly explaining terms such as the aforementioned Designated Community (DC) and Preservation Description Information (PDI). In lieu of a conclusion, Marks provides a list of five recommendations that serve to reiterate and encapsulate his main points, now expanded to a big-picture view of the standard. He writes, for example, “ISO 16363 is not about conforming to an idealized form of digital preservation operations, but about demonstrating that you are doing what you claim to be doing and that you are gaining the confidence of your Designated Community” (p. 57). The parting advice in this section is thoughtful and will be of genuine benefit to readers seeking to apply the standard to the development or improvement of their digital preservation activities. Finally, Appendix A of the module offers a brief case study authored by Bethany Anderson of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, who summarizes her experience using a draft version of Module 8 to assist with an informal ISO 16363 self-assessment of UIUC’s University Archives. The case study is a nice, almost “meta” bookend to the module, and demonstrates how an institution

might employ Marks' advice while using the standard to improve the infrastructure and administration of its digital preservation initiatives.

Module 8 offers very few disappointments. Readers seeking advice on particular digital preservation software, tools, and services will need to look elsewhere, as the author—rightly—acknowledges that such advice is beyond the scope of the module. Examples of tools and software, when they are given, are meant to be “illustrative, not prescriptive” (p. 4). Despite the clarity of the writing, the text does descend occasionally, and perhaps inevitably, into acronym soup. While there is a consistent focus on the need to make archival content accessible and intelligible to the user community, the reader might benefit from some guidance on how to translate the jargon of ISO 16363 into terms that varying constituents can understand, including donors, granting organizations, and administrators. Finally, because the publication of the module has followed so quickly behind the establishment of the standard itself, portions may read like history by the time readers get their hands on it. As the author points out, at the time of writing, no auditing bodies had emerged with ISO 16919 certification, the companion standard that governs the training of ISO 16363 auditors. Therefore, to date, no institution has achieved Trustworthy Digital Repository status in the eyes of the ISO standard. Although the core value of the module as a guide to the standard's requirements will endure, it will require frequent updates and revisions to stay current in this fast moving field.

The fundamental question that readers will have about Module 8 boils down to this: What information does the module provide that cannot be derived from the published version of ISO 16363 itself? Fortunately, as has already been suggested, the answer is a great deal. The standard follows a formula that presents a criterion followed by supporting text, examples of compliance, and a discussion. While this sounds comprehensive, these entries are often exceedingly brief, sometimes a single sentence in length. Module 8 provides flesh for this skeleton, bringing insider experience, context, tips, and tangible examples to each requirement, all in an accessible language and easy to follow organization.

Readers may have a second question about ISO 16363 and, by extension, Module 8. Series editor Michael Shallcross anticipates this question in his Editor's Note: “Why bother?” As the authors go on to explain, archives have a lot to gain from an engagement with the standard, no matter what stage of digital assets management and preservation they have achieved. In Shallcross' words, “All institutions—including those with little or no digital preservation experience—will do well to incorporate ISO 16363's core concepts into their planning and operations, whether or not they pursue formal certification as a Trustworthy Digital Repository” (p. viii). Some institutions may use the standard for education on digital preservation best practices; others may use the standard to perform a self-assessment or informal audit of their existing digital repository infrastructure; and still others may go the distance, requesting a formal audit using an ISO 16919 certified body. In all of these cases, archivists will be well served by Module 8, which should be considered an indispensable companion to ISO 16363.

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