

Chronicle of a Success

The problem

The Nation's Records Are a Mess

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Washington—A slice of America's history has become as unreadable as Egyptian hieroglyphics before the discovery of the Rosetta stone.

And there's more historic, scientific and business data in danger of dissolving into a meaningless jumble of letters, numbers and computer symbols. Americans paid billions to collect the information and may now have to fork over millions more to preserve it.

That's part of the price of the country's eager embrace of more and more powerful computers. Much information from the last 30 years is stranded on computer tape from primitive or discarded systems—unintelligible or soon to be so.

NEWSDAY JANUARY 3, 1991

Many computer files no longer readable

As a result, records were lost before researchers even knew what questions to ask.

"The ability to read our nation's historical records is threatened by the complexity of modern computers," said Rep. Bob Wise (W.Va.), chairman of a House information subcommittee that wants the government to start buying computers that will preserve data for future researchers. "Already the National Archives has computer records that can't be read." . . .

The solution

GOVERNMENT COMPUTER NEWS

THE NATIONAL NEWSPAPER OF GOVERNMENT COMPUTING ■ A CAHNERS PUBLICATION
VOLUME 13, NUMBER 17 ■ AUGUST 8, 1994

NARA uses tape conversion system to preserve records

The National Archives and Records Administration has stepped up its preservation of electronic records with the installation of a \$510,000 records maintenance system.

Responsible for preserving the government's electronic mail and other data stored in digital formats, NARA's Center for Electronic Records in 1992 contracted Muller Media Conversions Inc. of New York, to develop and install four standalone Archival Preservation Systems (APS) at NARA's

College Park, Md. site and a fifth system at Muller's headquarters.

The new systems, which became fully operable in May, will be used to transfer the thousands of government magnetic tapes NARA receives each year from disparate storage formats to a standardized medium, usually IBM Corp.'s 3480 data cartridges. According to Fynette Eaton, chief of the center's technical service branch, NARA previously farmed out much of this work to the computer labs at the National

Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Md.

Besides copying files to 3480 cartridges, APS also will be used to recover partly damaged files, maintain a catalog of all preserved data and create copies of that data on demand.

According to Chris Muller, president of Muller Media, the APS catalog database, which is stored on each system's hard drive, contains a list of which files were copied and a technical description for each file. . . .

The accolades

GCN

THE COMMUNITY

June, 1996

IAC/IRM honors innovative federal leaders in information technology

. . . IAC/IRM honors federal employees for their work in managing acquisitions and technology excellence. IAC/IRM, sponsored by the General Services Administration, is a forum for more than 300 federal IRM managers to exchange ideas about information technology policy and regulatory matters.

. . . Fynette Eaton, chief of technical services for the National Archives and Records Administration's Center for Electronic Records, receives a Technology Excellence Award for developing the Archival Preservation System to store records and capture data about their physical and technical attributes.

We are proud to participate in this effort to preserve the nation's electronic records. We offer both data preservation as a service, and software systems for in-house use. (Note: this document describes only "phase 1" of our relationship with NARA. More recent work includes software development support of iSCSI and Tape Libraries, deciphering President Nixon's appointment database, and migrating files from hundreds of 1990's Whitehouse backup tapes.) **With skill and hard work, MMC turns difficult problems into significant victories.** May we be of service to you? Please visit our website at www.mullermedia.com.