

# TVB EUROPE

Intelligence for the media & entertainment industry

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## THE EVOLUTION OF CINEMATIC TV

HOW HIGH-END TV IS SETTING A NEW STANDARD FOR THE SMALL SCREEN



**Democratising  
visual tools for all**



**Sustainability  
and media tech**



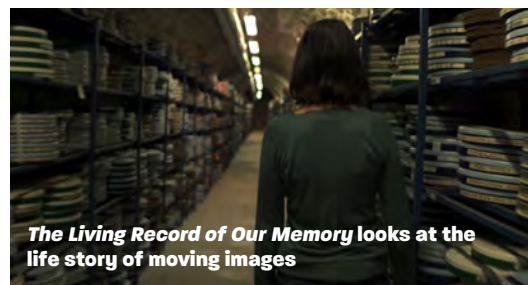
# PRESERVING THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Today's multi-channel television world has produced an increased demand for programming, both new and old. As **Kevin Hilton** discovers, this has put even greater pressure on archives, which are not only having to store modern digital media as well as older formats but do so in a sustainable way

**A**mong the misconceptions made about television archives is that they are a repository for old programmes. The reality is that they are as much about what is being produced today as shows, newsreels and amateur footage from the 20th century. And although digitisation has forced broadcasters, rights holders and the archive sector in general to consider what is in the vaults, there is the realisation that not only is transferring everything costly and time-consuming but digital formats are not as future-proof or stable as might have been thought.

This also applies to new devices and formats for acquiring material, not just digital cameras for filmmaking and newsgathering but also video/audio-capable mobile phones that have proved invaluable in providing eye-witness footage of incidents or just snapshots of everyday life. Unfortunately, being digital does not guarantee the longevity of either, making both long-form programmes and clips potentially as vulnerable as film and videotape, if not more so.

It is a growing problem and forms the basis of recent feature documentary, *The Living Record of Our Memory*. The director Inés Toharia, a filmmaker and specialist in film preservation, recognised there were problems



inherent in a vast number of people having the means to record video at any time. “Although we all know film and use media, even recording things on our cell phones, and are very in touch with this technology, we don't really think about how long it will last or that the lifespan of

these materials is very short,” she says. “Not all of what we create is valuable but what is valuable should be kept and taken care of.”

Toharia explains that the core of the film is not only about the “acts of preservation” themselves but also the people behind them. Among the talking heads are representatives from UCLA Film and TV Archive, Museum of Modern Art, BFI National Archive, Pixar, Kodak and Sony Pictures, plus filmmakers including Costa-Gavras, Martin Scorsese, Idrissa Ouédraogo and Ridley Scott. The archival consultant on the project, who also appears, is Adrian Wood, whose credits include *The Second World War in Colour* and *Churchill*. He feels there is now a greater awareness of the importance of visual records, both among professionals and the public, but sees both an upside and downside to digitising archive material.

“Digitisation seems to be the answer to everyone’s dreams but the fact is you have to keep manufacturing LTO tapes [linear tape-open, a magnetic data storage format] and recorders because they have a finite lifespan and I don’t know exactly what that is doing for the environment,” Wood comments.

“If we rely upon server farms backed up in different locations, that has a huge cost to the environment. That’s the price of accessibility. I’m all in favour of accessibility but not at the cost of preservation.”

While film and videotape archives also have an ecological impact, largely due to the necessary temperature-controlled storage areas (as is the case with LTO and servers), Wood says both kinds of media can exist for a long time if kept well. “You can put a roll of film in a good environment and, if it’s on a polyester base, it will last an infinite number of years,” he explains. “I’ve seen nitrate film from more than a hundred years ago and it was in pristine condition because the emulsion and the base were produced properly. It’s about caring for the element on which the history is stored.”

This puts the onus on the archives and storage specialists dealing with a wide variety of formats and technologies. Among these is Digital Bedrock, a US company focusing on what it describes as “secure, off-cloud green storage”. It works with TV and film production companies, plus museums looking to store digital artworks. Founder and chief executive Linda Tadic observes that data-based material can be easily lost or accidentally deleted, making it more vulnerable than older formats, particularly film.

“Videotape is at risk just because of its nature, it was not meant to endure,” she adds. “But I would say digital content is at more risk than film. Some of the issues with TV preservation is that people don’t know what they have on digital files and they aren’t storing them well or they just throw everything up in the cloud. That’s



Archivists work to preserve film (Images courtesy El Grifilm Productions)

a huge waste of money because it’s a lot of content up there. Then, of course, where is this material? Can you manage it and is it being verified over time? There’s no need to store masters in the cloud if you’re not going to use them. It’s a waste of energy and those spinning hard drives are made out of rare earth materials, which the manufacturers know full well are finite.”

Digital Bedrock stores material on LTO tapes, with three copies of a project kept offline in different geographic locations. Tadic says fixity checks are carried out once a year to ensure files have not corrupted, with a programme of migrating to new generation LTOs as they become available.

The environmental impact of audio-visual archives is now a major issue, with the sector’s leading trade bodies undertaking a survey to assess the current situation. Instigated by INA (the French national AV institute), in conjunction with FIAT/IFTA (International Federation of Television Archives), the aim is to evaluate the level of awareness of the impact of archives on the environment; assess current practices and measures being taken; and to develop best practices and “adapt norms and standards”. The plan is for a report based on the results to be published on INA’s website and discussed at the FIAT/IFTA World Conference in October this year.

Inés Toharia welcomes such initiatives but says people still need to change their attitudes when it comes to obsolescence of technology, particularly trading up for the latest laptops or mobile phones. “We’ve got used to that but don’t realise the digital materials, what we’ve recorded and what we’re watching, won’t last,” she concludes. “Archives are now working on solutions and coming up with standards but it’s also about people’s personal habits and our personal memories. We have to realise that if we don’t take care of them they will very easily disappear.” ■



Inés Toharia (top), Adrian Wood and Linda Tadic