

Preserving 150 years of history at HSBC

HSBC partners with Preservica to protect and future-proof digital assets of unique strategic, historical and brand importance.



Background

HSBC is one of the largest financial services organisations in the world. Founded in 1865 in Hong Kong to finance trade between Europe and Asia, the bank now serves around 46 million customers and operates in more than 70 countries and territories.

HSBC Archives reflect the colourful 150 year history of the organisation. The archives, a varied mix of paper and born digital content, include letters, photographs, cartoons, films, advertising, banknotes, architectural drawings and interviews with staff – all of which shed light on the social, economic and political history of those communities and countries where HSBC has done business.

Head of safeguarding HSBC's 150 years of financial and cultural history is Tina Staples, Global Head of Archives. Managing a team that comprises around 20 members of staff across London, Hong Kong, Paris and New York, Tina has steadily grown the reputation of the archive over the last few years. Tina comments, "The historical importance and depth of the archive is considerable, and with the bank having celebrated its 150-year anniversary in 2015, the archive was a vital resource in collating the historical materials used for the books, films, exhibitions and events that celebrated the milestone throughout 2015".

Tina and her team receive regular information and access requests from employees, academic researchers, local and family historians and members of the general public. Far from being dusty relics, the archives bring significant value and credibility to the HSBC brand.

Challenge

Prior to engaging with Preservica, the vast HSBC collection, lacked an adequate cataloguing system or digital preservation capability. Tina comments: "With huge amounts of physical and digital materials already in storage, as well as large volumes of born digital content being produced on a day to day basis, we needed a system that could preserve digital content over the long-term and synchronise with a management system to provide a cohesive view of the archive."

The mix of materials also posed a particular challenge; newer formats including Lotus Notes emails with attachments would be harder to manage as they needed to be findable and renderable within the system over the long-term.

The road to beginning a digital preservation project first required approval and buy-in from across the organisation. The complex environment of the financial sector and the global nature of the archived material raised various confidentiality and information security issues. Risk, Legal and Compliance, IT and Records Management departments all needed to be in alignment before the project could go ahead.

Tina was very proactive making the case for the archives and digital preservation to senior decision makers within HSBC.



Solution

Having established that a new integrated digital archive was a crucial corporate resource, Tina and her team began to approach different software providers. Selecting the on-premise Enterprise Edition of Preservica's software, the HSBC team was excited by the way in which unifying the archival material would reduce the number of processes for archivists. The team are charged with preserving digital records, processing them and delivering content and information to meet the constant stream of requests from users.

Tina comments: "With a single digital deposit these days potentially including around 50,000 records of fairly unstructured content, archive structure and metadata needs to be editable to make it accessible and useful to future users."

HSBC's system currently handles 200,000 archive records, including 23,000 digital files totaling nearly 3.5TB in Preservica. These include core decision-making and corporate born digital materials from the working life of the bank. Digital copies of images, audio visual assets and oral history records have also been ingested by the software. Among the audio-visual assets are the 'Hong Kong Bank Video Brief' tapes dating back to the 1980s. These forerunners to HSBC's current TV platform offer a tantalising glimpse of life at the bank in decades past.

Preservica's Enterprise Edition automates the challenge of migrating files to newer formats over time, ensuring future useability, and providing a full audit trail. A robust security and user access framework is also integral to the system.

The solution's support of identifying and characterising over 800 different file formats and providing 300+ migration pathways is critical, as is its integration with HSBC's catalogue system, which enables the synchronisation of metadata between physical and digital materials.

The Future

The team plan to extend their use of Preservica to allow the archive to receive, manage, digitally preserve and disseminate a wider range of records from across the corporation.

Improving usability so that content is logically collected and easy to find will be a key focus for the bank moving forward. HSBC Digital Archives Manager, James Mortlock, is responsible for shaping the future vision of the project. He points out: "Our processes need to develop as we continue to build the digital archive and its reputation. Existing processes and attitudes to collecting and preserving both digital and physical records need to adapt to ensure that we keep up to pace with how today's records are being created and used. We look forward to continuing to work with Preservica to ensure that we get the best value from the solution for years to come".

Ultimately, Tina Staples and the team hope to increase the number of access points for ingest to the archives, and put automated processes in place that will allow non-archivists to access, add to and engage with the collected materials as a resource. "The HSBC archives are a treasure trove of valuable cultural and corporate history, and are hugely important both inside the bank and beyond", says Tina. "Embarking on this project of digital preservation is an enormous challenge, but one that we're excited to undertake as we help protect HSBC's history in digital form for generations to come.



"We needed a system that could not only preserve digital content over the longterm, but also synchronise with a cataloguing and management system to provide a single cohesive view of the archive."

Tina Staples - Global Head of Archives, HSBC