

I Took The One Less Traveled By: DAT Migration at Radio New Zealand's Sound Archives/Nga Taonga Korero

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Whenever Internet-based discourse turns to the migration of Digital Audio Tape, it is inevitable that a participant will tentatively ask after their peers' experiences with using Digital Data Storage (DDS) drives to 'rip' the audio bit stream and save that bit stream as an uncompressed audio file. Responses are often mixed and many respondents cite difficulties or compromises that needed to be reached in order for the solution to succeed. Of course, these responses are often far too casual to satisfy the evaluation needs of institutions whose shelves are stacked with rapidly degrading DATs. Moreover, the technical requirements of the DDS solution are poorly documented and hosted on websites whose content is woefully outdated. At Radio New Zealand's Sound Archives/Nga Taonga Korero in Christchurch, New Zealand, we are experimenting with this solution to migrate our collection of 5500 DATs to BWF for storage in our digital repository. Like many other institutions, we have heard that the system works, to some degree, and we intend to take a critical, detailed approach to quantifying the complaints that are alluded to by our peers. This paper will be divided into three sections. The first will document the entire evaluation process, from the procurement of hardware through installation and testing. In this section, I intend to describe the underlying architectures that make the solution viable and outline any issues that we had during the construction of our system. In addition, I will discuss our methods for quantifying any compromises that needed to be made and how those compromises have affected the archival integrity of the resulting files. In the second section, I will describe our workflows and present statistical data to describe how our resources (i. e. time and money) were allocated. The final section will make recommendations to the archival community based on our findings. I intend to tailor these recommendations to various institutional configurations: i.e. I will consider the suitability of the solution for archives of differing goals, resources, and collection size. I will also suggest how the DDS solution could be improved and what role archivists, institutions and IASA might have in making those improvements. Although the primary focus of this paper may seem somewhat esoteric, or entirely inappropriate, to some factions of the IASA community, it should be noted that the central message is not entirely prescriptive. Instead, this paper should be seen as a means to discuss the broader issues surrounding the migration of obsolete formats: - What compromises do we need to make in order to migrate large collections, and what factors drive those compromises? - If replay technology is scarce, who misses out? - Should we build new tools, or modify existing ones, to facilitate migration? - Who is going to build them? - Why are some of our most powerful software tools developed commercially and sold at an exclusionary price point? - What can we do, as a community, to ensure that 'everybody wins'?