Podcast Preservation
Survey Findings
February 5, 2019
I am familiar with practices that professional archivists use to manage born-digital files.  

I rename my digital audio files in some way.  

I backup my digital audio files in some way.  

I organize some or all of my digital audio files into folders, or practice some sort of file organizing system.
I back up all my files, including raw tape and draft cuts, in uncompressed formats
- Institutionals: 46%
- Independents: 33%

I back up most of my files, including some raw tape and draft cuts, in uncompressed or compressed formats
- Institutionals: 26%
- Independents: 21%

I back up some of my files, including some raw tape and draft cuts, in uncompressed or compressed formats
- Institutionals: 13%
- Independents: 14%

I back up my final cuts, in compressed or uncompressed formats
- Institutionals: 12%
- Independents: 25%

I don't back up my files
- Institutionals: 29%
- Independents: 5%
I back up all my files, including raw tape and draft cuts, in uncompressed formats.

I back up most of my files, including some raw tape and draft cuts, in uncompressed or compressed formats.

I back up some of my files, including some raw tape and draft cuts, in uncompressed or compressed formats.

I back up my final cuts, in compressed or uncompressed formats.

I don't back up my files.

- Blue: I work for a professional podcast network
- Green: I work for a public media broadcaster
- Yellow: I work for a for-profit media company, that does not primarily make podcasts
- Red: I produce my own podcasts independently
- Purple: I am a freelance producer
- Gray: I produce a podcast for a non-media institution
I work for a professional podcast network
I work for a public media broadcaster
I work for a for-profit media company, that does not primarily make podcasts
I produce my own podcasts independently
I am a freelance producer
I produce a podcast for a non-media institution
How much of a podcast’s files do you preserve?

**Behaviors**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutionals</th>
<th>Independents and Freelancers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most or all</td>
<td>65%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Some or final cuts</td>
<td>39%</td>
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<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>6%</td>
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<td>30%</td>
<td>55%</td>
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- Most or all
- Some or final cuts
- None
An interesting and perhaps unexpected finding is that among the respondents, the under-35 cohort was more likely to be employed by an institution of some sort, while 35 and up respondents were more likely to be independent producers.
When asked the degree to which they organized their audio files into a system, and while the average was the same between the two groups, there was divergence in the intensity of response at the top end.

But on the question of backups, there was a clear difference - the average score of under-35s (3.88) was significantly lower than 35 and up (4.20).

Speculatively, this difference may derive from either hard-won experience or the substantial difference in practice of older podcasters who came up in an era before autosave and where storage was at a premium (or both). For younger podcasters who've always had automatic cloud backup and Dropbox instances, perhaps the central urgency of actively backing up has not set in to the same degree.
Among respondents, more men than women reported backing up all of their files - though more women back up “most” perhaps suggesting a more structured approach.
Among men and women who work for organizations, more men report full preservation policies, while more women report both “some” and final cut preservation - as well as being unaware of organizational policy.
The men who responded were overwhelmingly more likely to be independent or freelance producers than women (though those statuses were still the top among women respondents.

Women on the other hand were twice as likely to work for public media (14% vs. 7%) as the men in the sample.
Those who back up on the Internet Archive are different!

70% produce podcasts independently, as opposed to 49% of the total sample

They also tend to back up on both external hard drives (69%) and cloud storage (65%) - and those who use cloud storage tend to use both Google Drive (67%) and Dropbox (63%)

They feel strongly about the Internet Archive - one says, “All podcasts should have at least their final cut archived at the Internet Archive, as a bare minimum.”

Another has made improvements on their own, saying, “I used to only archive raw audio and compressed final cuts. Now, in addition to raw audio and compressed final cuts, I archive each individual track of a final cut (so as to rebuild a multi-track at a later date and make changes, ie for possible updated re-publish), a compressed final cut without any music tracks, and the individual music tracks.”

They have broad awareness of institutional issues, as well, as one says, “As someone who works for a public broadcaster, I often worry about whether we're archiving our work properly. Our latest archiving system is relatively new, but I find it difficult to search and retrieve files. Often, I find myself putting final cuts of my work in personal cloud storage because I'm not sure whether I'll be able to find it in our organization's system in a few years.”

And another pushes for greater public discussion, saying, “I don’t think the archiving of digital files is every really discussed among artists who are web-based (musicians, comedians, podcasters, etc). Any basic info somewhere would be extremely helpful.”
Even among users who are completists in their preservation practices, organizations don’t support that practice.

27% of respondents back up all their files in uncompressed formats; and of those, 68% work for a larger organization - these are those organizational practices.

What's your organization’s backup and archival strategy?

- All files in uncompressed formats: 32%
- I am unfamiliar with my organization's backup strategy: 28%
- Most files in uncompressed or compressed formats: 11%
- No system in place for archiving files: 11%
- Final Cuts: 11%
- Some files in uncompressed or compressed formats: 8%
- Others: 2%

This points to a major problem in media organizations - that even for the individuals who are most thorough, over a quarter are unfamiliar with the organizational strategy, and over 10% of those organizations don’t even have a backup strategy.

One respondent gets to the core of this tension, saying, “I feel like the backups I make I make with the intention that if something happens during a podcast’s production - the dreaded coffee spill all over the computer/I get mugged, etc. - I will have another copy. I don’t know that I've thought much about storing them for the long term. If I leave my position, I don't think they have a plan in place to maintain the files. I might take some with me (for example, wavs of final episodes) but would I take everything? Probably not.”

And even some of these completists feel at sea - one says, “I'm a mess, please help! I feel generally lost and know I am not being organized in the best way.”
Comparing the samples of those who back up all files in compressed formats (27%) vs. those who only back up final cuts (18%) is revealing.

When asked the degree to which they organized their audio files into a system, those who make full backups recorded much higher overall scores (4.45) than those who only backup final cuts (4.16).

Full Backup vs. Final Cuts

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External hard-drive
Apple Time Machine
RAID storage
Optical media
Cloud storage
Internet Archive

Those who made full backups were significantly more focused on using external hard drives (81%) than final cut users (62%); similarly they used Apple Time Machine far more (20% vs. 4%).

The inverse was true of cloud storage (70% vs. 78%).
Comparing the samples of those who back up all files in compressed formats (27%) vs. those who only back up final cuts (18%) is revealing.

Those who make full backups tend to wear more hats (avg. 1.4 affiliations) than those who only backup final cuts (avg. 1.2), and are more represented in public media, and professional podcast networks, whereas those who only backup final cuts tend to be more often independent podcast producers.

Among those who work for an organization, those organizations’ strategies and institutional awareness seem to have a strong relationship with individuals’ own practices - the contrast is strongest when the policy is in accordance with the users’ own practice, and again, it is striking how often both users are unaware of their organizations’ strategy.

### Full Backup vs. Final Cuts

- **Professional podcast network**
  - Full Backup: 60%
  - Final Cut: 40%
- **Public media broadcaster**
  - Full Backup: 50%
  - Final Cut: 50%
- **For-profit media company**
  - Full Backup: 30%
  - Final Cut: 70%
- **Produce Podcast for an Institution**
  - Full Backup: 90%
  - Final Cut: 10%
- **Independent Podcast Producer**
  - Full Backup: 0%
  - Final Cut: 100%
- **Freelance Podcast Producer**
  - Full Backup: 50%
  - Final Cut: 50%

### Awareness of Backup Strategies

- **All files in uncompressed formats**
  - Full Backup: 28%
  - Final Cut: 32%
- **Some or most files**
  - Full Backup: 8%
  - Final Cut: 13%
- **Final Cuts**
  - Full Backup: 11%
  - Final Cut: 19%
- **No system in place for archiving files**
  - Full Backup: 17%
  - Final Cut: 13%
- **I am unfamiliar with my organization's backup strategy**
  - Full Backup: 28%
  - Final Cut: 35%
Only a very small share of respondents (<7%) don’t back up their files at all. What else can we learn from these outliers?

A plurality also don’t rename their audio files (49%) or organize them into some sort of file system (46%)

For those who have an institutional affiliation, a plurality (47%) also aren’t familiar with that organization’s backup practices.

One of these respondents shows the need for better education around these practices, saying, “We don’t manage this well and I would like to get better at it. We work with the KSU library very effectively to manage our print digital files (from newspaper, magazines) but have yet to cross this river.”

The small size of this sample is hopeful, and the responses show that along with even the best individual practice, better institutional policies can help close the gap and promote better preservation practices.
“Releasing all my podcasts with a Creative Commons 4.0 license allows others to download, store, rehost and distribute without any copyright issues. As long as the attribution is not edited out, anyone can do anything with the files. I hope this encourages or allows any archiving or library service, or third party hosting service, to do with them what they want, including commercial exploitation.”

“We have 20 years of audio to back up. Our final cuts are all available online, but we need a better system for backing up raw audio files and sessions. We are looking into cloud storage.”