

Getting to the Bottom Line: 20 Cost Questions for Digital Preservation

The following questions are being made freely available by the MetaArchive Cooperative Outreach Committee to assist institutions with their comparative analyses of various digital preservation solutions. Ask these of any digital preservation solution provider. Features and functionality are important, but those are often the easy pieces of information to learn about. Identifying and comparing short- and long-term costs, including a variety of up-front, recurring, and sometimes hidden fees, can make Getting to the Bottom Line a difficult task. Users of this resource are encouraged to make use of all or as many of the questions as desired.

1. What are the solution provider's licensing, subscription or membership fees?

- Have these fees increased or decreased over the past three years, and why?
- How often is the fee structure reviewed? And how are fees set?
- How are customers/subscribers/members consulted during any such reviews?

2. Are additional memberships required to participate in the solution?

- If so, what are the fees associated with those memberships?

3. Is there a minimum licensing/subscription/membership term?

4. What are the solution provider's storage fees?

- Have these fees increased or decreased over the past three years, and why?
- How often is the fee structure reviewed? And how are fees set?
- How are customers/subscribers/members consulted during any such reviews?

5. Are there limits on the number or size of collections that can be deposited?

- Is there a maximum limit on the amount of storage that can be utilized?

6. How does the solution provide for increases in storage capacity?

- And how do these increases affect fees, if at all?

7. Do any fees paid (licensing/subscription/membership/storage) include geographically distributed copies of content?

- If so, how many copies, and in what geographic locations?
- If not, what's the additional cost for this option?

8. Am I responsible for obtaining any additional hardware or software at my own expense in order to work with the solution?

- If Yes, what are the average hardware/software costs?
- Does the solution provider publish specifications or requirements?
- What is the recommended replacement cycle?
- Are there any additional costs for security (e.g., encrypted storage, etc.)?

9. What are a few specific examples of tasks, services, or resources that my fees for this solution are supporting (e.g., staff salaries, infrastructure upgrades, research and development, etc.)?

10. On what schedule are customers/subscribers/members billed?

11. Does the solution provider charge a one-time setup, implementation, or initial ingest fee, above and beyond any ongoing fees?

12. On average, how long does it take to begin using the solution once a contract or service license agreement (SLA) has been signed?

- What steps are involved?

13. Does the solution provide basic documentation or instructions on getting started?

14. Does the solution provider prepare content for ingest?

- If so, do any fees being paid cover tasks like verifying inventories, performing fixity checks, and/or repairing any files that may get damaged in the process of sending content to the solution provider?
- If not, does the solution provider cover/defer any costs to train or outsource?

15. To what degree are the steps related to ingest, description, preservation, etc. automated?

16. If the solution is a non-profit (or run by one), are copies of the annual operating budget and financial statement shared with the members?

- If not, are there plans to?

17. In terms of sustainability, does the solution provider have a strategic plan, succession plan, or disaster recovery plan?

- If so, how up-to-date are such plans?
- Has the solution provider engaged in any audits or risk assessments?
- Are any of the plans or audit/assessment results publicly available?

18. Is there a charge for retrieving content from the solution?

- If yes, how much is it?
- How is this charge calculated and what does it cover?
- Under what terms? Are there any restrictions or limitations?

19. Is there a charge for deleting content from the solution?

- If yes, how much is it?
- How is this charge calculated and what does it cover?
- Under what terms? Are there any restrictions or limitations?

20. SELF-QUESTION: Am I, as a customer/subscriber/member, also paying for local backups above and beyond the preservation service costs?

- If so, how up-to-date are such plans?
- Has the solution provider engaged in any audits or risk assessments?
- Are any of the plans or audit/assessment results publicly available?

MetaArchive Cooperative is a digital preservation network created and hosted by and for cultural memory organizations.