

the Archive-Skills consultancy

Info-byte: Retrospective Conversion

What is retrospective conversion?

Retrospective conversion is the process by which existing hard-copy catalogues and lists, whether on paper or cards, are converted to machine-readable form. Note: In the library context it can also be the capture and manipulation of records from an existing automated system.

Why is it done?

To make use of existing archival descriptions, known as legacy data, in automated and networked systems without having to re-do the description work.

How is it done?

By either:

- *Scanning the existing finding aids*
This can only be done if the existing finding aids are good quality typescript; the resulting images will need to be run through optical character recognition software to produce “live” documents which can then be imported to the automated system.
- *Re-keying the existing finding aids*
This is becoming the more usual method because it allows almost any type of existing finding aid, including hand-written cards and lists, to be converted; also the re-keying can be done to meet ISAD(G) standards in EAD format. There are a number of companies, mainly based outside the UK, which offer this service. For example, the PRO (the National Archives) has used a company in Mauritius which gives 99.9% accuracy. The existing finding aids have to be “marked up” so that data fields and level of description are clear and can be readily understood by the keying contractor.

Further information

- *Full Disclosure: releasing the value of library and archive collections*
UKOLN (1999)
Available from < <http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/services/lic/fulldisclosure/report.pdf> >
- retro@jiscmail.ac.uk
A news and discussion list on a national strategy for retrospective catalogue conversion
- A2A Access to Archives, national retrospective cataloguing programme
< <http://www.pro.gov.uk/archives/a2a/default.htm> >



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