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Media Management

Deep Dish T.V. is faced with a difficult challenge in preparing to efficiently archive and store digital media. Developing a strategy for managing and creating space for accumulating files is a problem for all organizations that collect digital material. This task is a particularly complicated endeavor for Deep Dish because of the manner in which projects are received and accumulated. In a traditional, studio-based television network, the production process is centralized, media is easier to manage and control because the creative process is generally standardized. Deep Dish, however, encourages submission of edited projects from a wide variety of individuals, in order to provide the public a broader spectrum of opinion. On the organization's website, Deep Dish announces this distinction as a point of pride. "While commercial networks present a homogenous and one-dimensional view of society," the homepage notes, "Deep Dish thrives on diversity." Although the diversity of collected material helps make Deep Dish a vital organization, it is also at the center of the problem for applying a unified standard for the preservation data files.

The individuals who produce material for Deep Dish TV make it a unique source for alternative points of view and also an archiving headache. With each editor comes a distinct creative process and a different method for saving production elements and finished projects. During post-production an editor will focus on producing a segment of quality and though many are thinking of archival practices while they are working, finishing the project is the primary objective. Despite an editor's best effort to save important files, there will be natural variations in methods of arranging media. It's easy to imagine a scenario where clips used to construct segments are not submitted or links to specific clips are offline, making reconstructing of the project after submission difficult or even impossible. Conversely, a creator might save redundant or unused media files, which can take up excessive, valuable space on a drive or server.

Since methods of delivering materials to the archive will vary from project to project, any application of a standard procedure for digital media management at Deep Dish is fraught with difficulties. Ideally, processes of media management would involve a

set of specific conventions, applied uniformly to files prior to ingestion. These standards might regulate types of files designated for preservation, determine naming conventions for specific media clips, and safeguard against redundancy. The reality of the situation is that any form of media management for Deep Dish would have applied on the back end of the post-production. This work would presumably be done with someone associated with the network or by a specialist in moving image archiving but in either case, the person managing the media would not necessarily understand the creative process in which segments were constructed or how specific files were used. An attempt to sort through the material manually would require an intensely concentrated effort and even with the best intentions, important production elements could easily be accidentally deleted which would undermine the objectives of any preservation work.

However, there may be an automated process that could be applied to projects created for Deep Dish, to improve the preservation status of the entire collection without the investment of significant resources. There is one common trait among most of the segments produced for Deep Dish: the final projects are assembled in a Final Cut Pro environment. Built into Final Cut is a tool for organizing files called Media Manager, which can be applied to files at any stage in the production process, including long after a particular project is completed.

Essentially, media manager is a tool designed to move, copy and delete files according to the desires of the individual archiving the material. It can be applied on a clip-by-clip basis, to a portion of a segment or it can be set to organize an entire project at once. The automated feature can be used to analyze media clips so unused files can be deleted without fear of disturbing final projects or isolate important elements and move them to a specific destination where they will be earmarked for preservation. Files can also be copied which facilitates the important archival procedure of backing up files to multiple locations. If a particular computer crashed, a hard drive was corrupted or a server went down, it is good to know that files can be retrieved from multiple sources and be protected in case a particular device failed.

After briefly reviewing the project entitled “Shocking and Awful” it became clear that applying media manager to all of Deep Dish projects might significantly improve the preservation status of the collection. There were a number of video sequences and audio

files named in bins as clips associated with but the media was no longer linked to the listed names. There were large QuickTime files, which had been rendered and placed in bin even though the content had not been used in the edited project. Files rendered and digitized take up a considerable amount of space and someone could decide that these unused clips could be discarded to make room for more essential material. This is the kind of process for which media manager was created. Files could be more efficiently arranged with minimal human effort.