

STATEMENT:

'Free' digitisation of audiovisual content: FIAT/IFTA advice

In the past 22 months, FIAT/IFTA has been informed that several European television archives - members and non-members of FIAT/IFTA - have received proposals to have certain video cassette formats from their archives digitised / migrated by a third party. It was emphasized that this digitisation would be free of charge.

Several members have asked the FIAT/IFTA Preservation and Migration Commission to advise on such proposal. In recent months, members of the Commission have studied the documents in which the provider sets out the proposals and developed an advice in response. This elaborate advice can be requested from FIAT/IFTA via an e-mail to office@fiatifta.org.

In a broader sense, FIAT/IFTA pronounces the following statement with regard to this kind of proposals:

The members of the International Federation of Television Archives (FIAT/IFTA) have about 30 years of experience in digitisation projects large and small, and collectively have migrated several million hours of video from tapes to files. One of our aims as an organisation is to contribute to the long-term preservation of audiovisual archives in the best possible conditions and in a way that does justice to the fact that in principle it concerns audiovisual heritage.

FIAT/IFTA recommends organisations receiving a proposal including a 'free' digitisation of audiovisual archive media to carefully consider such a proposal, focusing on three aspects:

1. which actions are included in the proposal and which are not? FIAT/IFTA points out that digitisation projects involve much more than just converting the signal on an archive carrier into a file. FIAT/IFTA estimates that the actual conversion of the video signal of professional video cassettes represents roughly only 30% of a total project budget in which all additional aspects such as logistics, quality control, metadata linking, long-term digital storage, etc. are sufficiently covered.
2. what guarantees are there that the digitisation is done in a qualitative manner? FIAT/IFTA points in particular to the importance of good quality control, professional preparation of the carriers before the actual digitisation, the use of playback devices of the best possible quality and the importance of choosing a suitable output format.

3. what guarantees are offered with regard to the use of the resulting files by the organisation performing the digitisation? Can the archive fully agree to all uses that are permitted - or not explicitly prohibited - by the agreement? FIAT/IFTA notes that today the valorisation of audiovisual archive material is not limited to publication on all kinds of platforms, but can also include, for example, the extraction of data and the training of algorithms.

In summary, FIAT/IFTA states that a proposal for 'free' digitisation may come across as a very attractive offer, but that even if the actual conversion is paid for by a third party, it remains necessary to properly estimate the costs remaining on the part of the archive. Furthermore, in the name of a proper preservation, one of the core activities of any archive, it is essential to estimate and monitor the quality of the digitisation. Finally, the archive also has a clear responsibility to ensure that the ways in which third parties can use the data resulting from the digitisation is and remains in line with its own objectives in the short and longer term.

Archives who would require more information about the digitisation of video cassette formats are also referred to:

- The [FIAT/IFTA Outsourced Migration Guideline](#), which helps archives that wish to call upon the services of a third party for the migration of their archive media to prepare a tender.
- [IASA TC06](#), the recommendation of our sister organisation IASA for the preservation of video recordings.
- The possibility to directly seek advice from members of the FIAT/IFTA Preservation and Migration Commission via pmc@fiatifta.org.