

# MEET JASON SCOTT



**J**ASON SCOTT, *Free Range Archivist at Internet Archive, talks about the Wayback Machine, unearthing hitherto hidden content, and rescuing potentially valuable content otherwise destined for oblivion.*

## WHAT YOU DO IN YOUR ROLE AS FREE RANGE ARCHIVIST AND SOFTWARE CURATOR AT INTERNET ARCHIVE?

My job at the Internet Archive – archive.org – mostly involves helping to bring in a large amount of data from many sources, as well as bringing to light the great items in the archive’s collections. There are many people out there with gigabytes of interesting data who aren’t sure about how to add it to the archive, so I help with that. I also do public speaking, podcasts and interviews like this one to help people understand what the archive is about.

We’re mostly known for the Wayback Machine, the site that lets you view the web up to 20 years ago, but we’ve got dozens, maybe hundreds of great things going on in terms of uploads or providing access to culture for the

Jason Scott

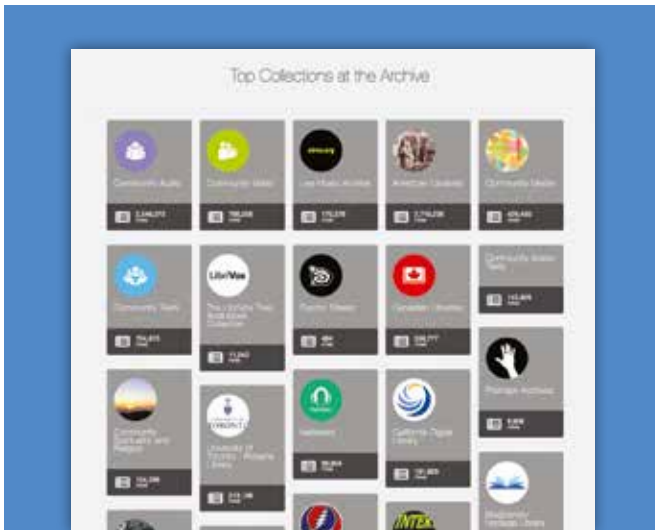
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internet at large. I’m mostly floating around online to make people aware of it all and help them become part of it, if they so choose.

## WHAT DO YOU LOVE MOST ABOUT YOUR JOB?

What’s great about the Internet Archive is that people usually find great value and happiness in it once they’re aware of it. The best part of my job is introducing folks to collections or content that they had no idea that the archive had been providing.

Another great part is when I find something out there, like thousands of hours of music or hundreds of issues of a magazine, and send it flying into the archive’s stacks. There are scripts and routines that help ingest the material and which make easy-to-use players and readers for the material. These same scripts and routines put the material up for people to use, all without human interaction. So it’s a bit like watching books march themselves into the shelves and then watching as people stumble upon the items and make them part of their lives. It’s very rewarding. I’ve not grown tired of it in the least.



### HOW DO YOU FIND OUT ABOUT NEW CONTENT THAT NEEDS SAVING?

I usually get emails, tweets and direct messages from a range of followers and friends who know I'm one of the people to hit up when the news of information going away comes up. I also watch news and hear about site shutdowns or about material that's at risk. In an average week I probably get alerted to about a half-dozen such things.

### WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BIGGEST ISSUES AROUND COLLECTING DATA FOR THE INTERNET ARCHIVE?

I'm not going to say space isn't a problem, but it's not our biggest problem, since the solution to any space issue is to add more space. (The Archive has about 22 petabytes of unique data, so we're used to dealing with a lot of disks). The bigger issues are where the solution isn't just a case of 'do what you were doing, but more'. We are always trying to improve metadata and usefulness, and the transition of the web to mobile or to low-bandwidth environments always presents an issue when your content is huge.

### WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES AROUND MAKING THE CONTENT EASILY ACCESSIBLE TO USERS?

I wouldn't say there's anything unique about our content that's different from that in many museums and libraries. People like some of it, don't like other parts, and want to know if we can have more of what they like and less of what they don't. As the world goes mobile, it will be more complicated to present something like a book or a large amount of data to an end user. And we'll always have to deal with tracking metadata and findability so that folks can find what they're looking for and come back to what they found later.

### WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR FAVOURITE PROJECTS THAT YOU'VE MANAGED AT THE INTERNET ARCHIVE?

My favourite project by far has been what we call the Emularity, the ability to play games and software in

the browser at the archive. From an army of contributors and volunteers, we now have the ability to host and easily provide access to hundreds of thousands of software programs across dozens of platforms at the archive. Whether it's old Macintosh HyperCard stacks from the 1980s or a particularly obscure arcade game, people are connecting to the archive by the thousands every day and making old software live again.

### DO YOU HAVE A SOFT SPOT FOR A PARTICULAR TYPE OF CONTENT?

I'm very fond of very small-circulation user group newsletters. They're honest, they're lovingly put together and they think about computers and technology in the most direct and human-oriented terms. There's a collection at <https://archive.org/details/computernewsletters>. Many are black and white, created by people working intensely on their own, and the runs are often very short. They're little wonders. 📧

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