

Videotape Preservation Reformatting Report

The videotape preservation reformatting survey was conducted from November, 2001-January 2002 by Sara Holmes based on questions developed by Jim Wheeler. The survey was posted to the AMIA, Videolib, Media Matters, and the Preservation Administrators Discussion Group (PADG) listservs on the Internet. Most, but not all, of the respondents were already familiar with the technical aspects and costs of video reformatting. The survey was available online at <http://home.att.net/~sjholmes/>.

The goal of the survey was to demonstrate the size of the market for archival copies of video both in terms of the numbers of videos and the number of video machines needed by archives, libraries, and other institutions that seek to preserve the contents of their videotape collections.

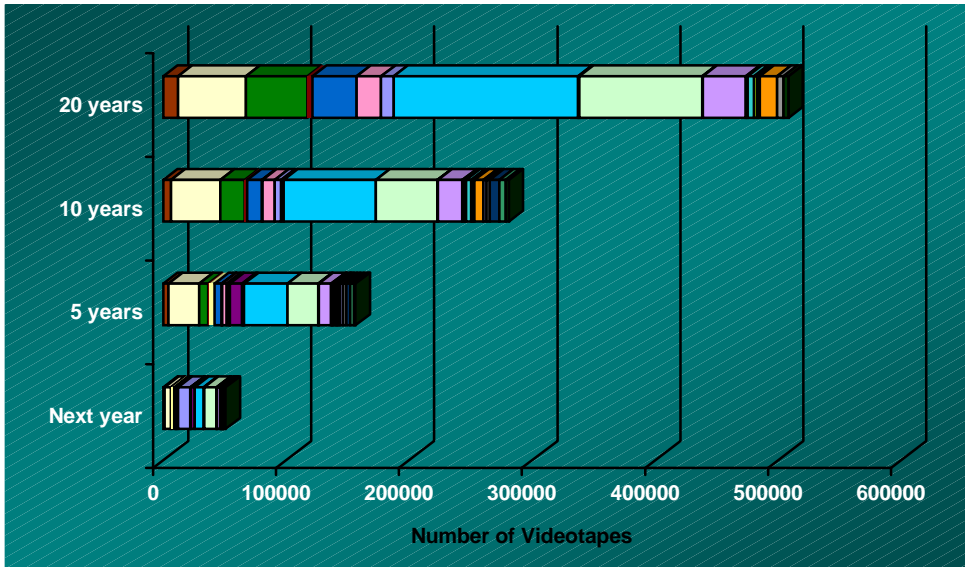
Although the survey was small in number, the 35 respondents reflect a wide variety of interests in preserving video. Respondents came from 18 U.S. states and four countries (Canada, U.K., Belgium, and South Africa). 12 respondents were from colleges or universities. Remaining respondents represented broadcasting associations or networks, research centers, regional or national libraries or archives, commercial, and private collections. Small groups, such as a symphony and a Native American language project, were also represented.

The smallest collection was estimated at 150, while the largest collection was approximately 150,000. All the collections totaled together were approximately 549,400 tapes. The mean average of the collections was 15,697 tapes and the median was 3,000. [Note: At least one respondent replied in number of hours, rather than number of tapes. Respondents could give an estimated range of the size, in which case, the average was used.]

The first set of questions asked how many videotapes in the respondent's collection would ideally be reformatted within the next year, five years, ten years or twenty years. Despite stipulating that the respondent could assume there would be no problems in obtaining the needed budget to handle reformatting within the next year, few respondents took the bait to answer they would reformat the entire collection. One respondent from a university library housing a collection estimated at 35,000 gave no figures for reformatting noting, "We have no real idea. A few hundred? A few thousand?" Another respondent representing an institution well established in media preservation made the comment that "Budget is less a problem than lack of staff."

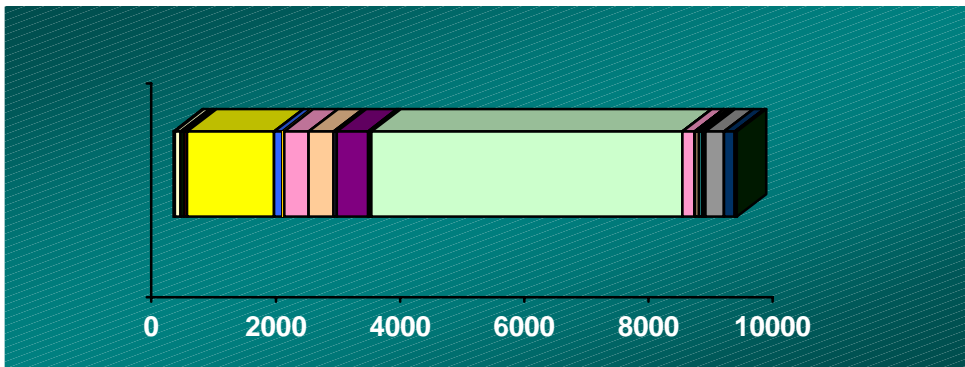
Many respondents had trouble trying to project 10 or 20 years into the future. Nearly half declined to consider how many tapes would be reformatted 20 years from now, and one person noted, "videotape would not be used" by that time. Despite the fact that 8 respondents declined to give a number for the amount of tapes they expected to reformat in ten years and 14 refused to speculate 20 years ahead, the sum of all the respondents show a tremendous anticipated growth over time in the number of tapes they hope to preserve by reformatting. (See graph)

Number of Videotapes to be Reformatted
 (Each color bar represents an individual respondent)



Totals:
 507,850
 219,755
 156,175
 50,645

Actual Videotapes Reformatted in Past Year
 (Colors correspond to those above)

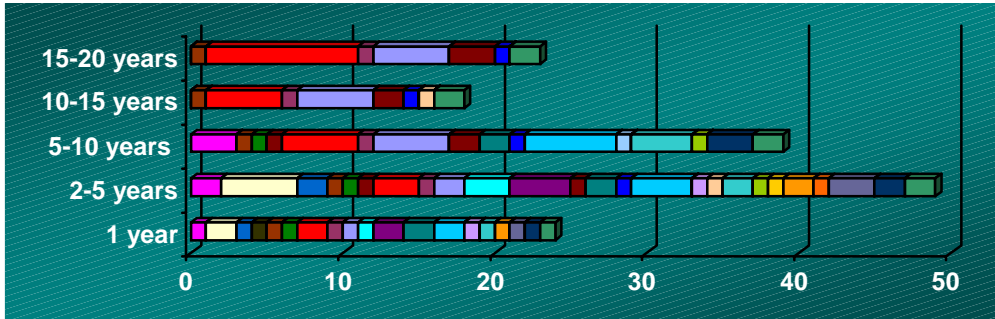


Total:
 9,067

Respondents also reported the number of videotapes actually reformatted in the past year. (See above chart.) The overall total of tapes was 9,067 tapes reformatted among the 35 institutions. This contrasts strongly to the overall total of 50,645 tapes the same institutions would ideally reformat within the next year.

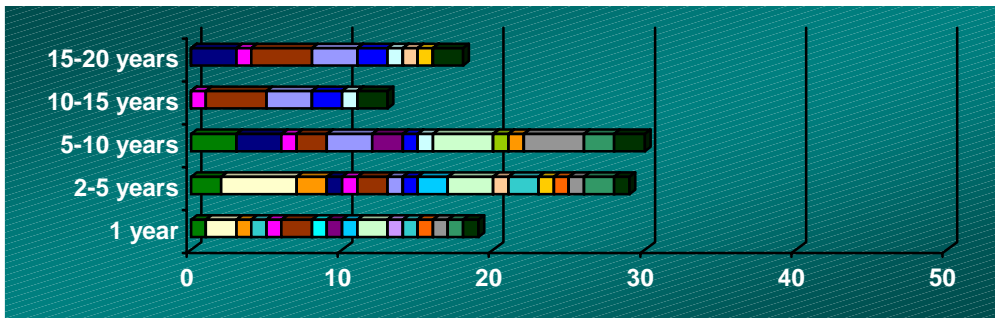
The second set of questions asked how many machines each institution would likely purchase in the next year, 2-5 years from the present, 5-10, 10-15, and 15-20 years from the present. The results show different budgeting patterns on the part of the institutions. Although some institutions expected a steady budget for equipment, others “saved up” for the expense. As the machines became more expensive, many avoided an initial purchase, in favor of an expectation to purchase in 2-5 or 5-10 years. In this set of questions, as in the first, there was a significant drop in the number of responses given in the 10-15 and 15-20 year categories. (See graphs on following page for the totals at each price range.)

**Number of machines expected to be purchased over time,
depending on machine cost**



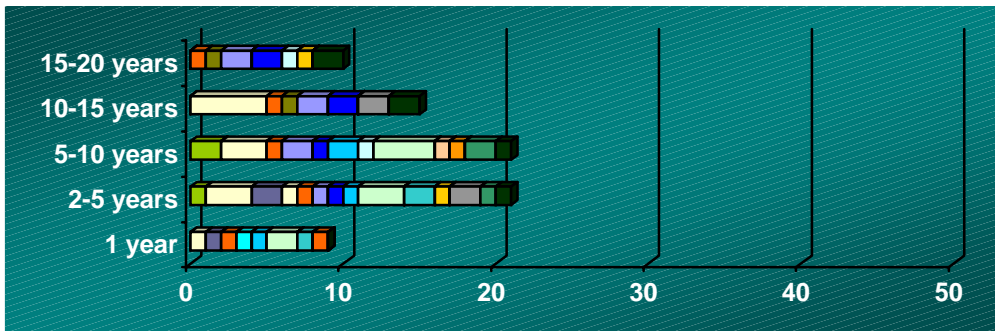
Totals:
23
18
39
50
24

Machines priced between \$5,000-8,000



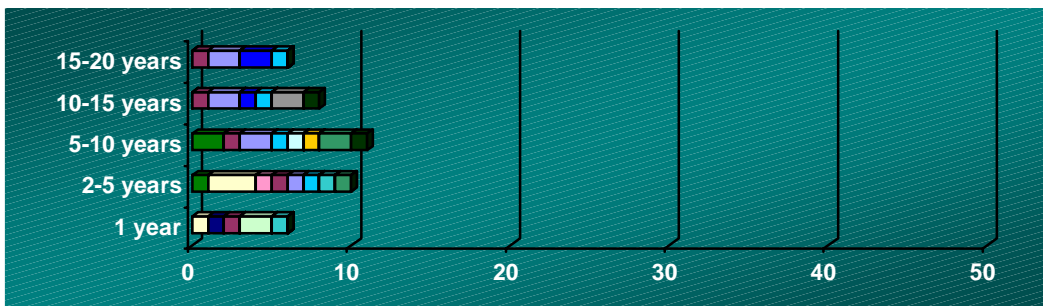
Totals:
18
13
30
29
19

Machines priced \$8,000-10,000



Totals:
10
15
21
21
9

Machines priced \$10,000-15,000



Totals:
8
7
14
10
6

Machines priced \$15,000-20,000