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**Michael Geist, Member  
CDIS Strategy Review Panel**

### **Canada's Digital Info Strategy Stuck in an Analog World**

My weekly technology law column ([Toronto Star version](#), [Ottawa Citizen version](#), [homepage version](#)) focuses on the Library and Archives Canada's (LAC) recently released draft [Canadian Digital Information Strategy](#) that may provide some momentum behind digitization plans in Canada. In today's technological world, most content is "born digital," yet there remains a rich history of books, music, film, photos, and other works in analog form. Since people increasingly have access solely to digital content, policy makers must confront the challenge of how to bring all of our culture and historical knowledge into the digital realm.

The strategy makes for sobering reading - Canada may have once been a world-leader in Internet access, yet today it finds itself years behind other countries in developing a clearly focused strategy to link digital access with digital information. Most of our major trading partners, including the United States, European Union, Australia, New Zealand, and China have already established digitization strategies that feature robust programs and ambitious plans. Moreover, some of those countries have benefited from private sector digitization initiatives led by Google, Yahoo, Microsoft, and the Internet Archive. Those countries recognized that an effective digitization strategy yields significant domestic benefits such as wider access to knowledge for all communities, a greater appreciation of national cultural heritage, and the facilitation of lifelong learning. There are tangible international advantages as well, since digital access supports cultural exports and collaborative scientific research.

In order to close the ever-widening gap, the strategy focuses on strengthening Canadian digital content creation, preserving older content, as well as maximizing access and use. The three-pronged strategy hits many of the right buttons by emphasizing the need to support the creation of digital content (many government funding programs are still stuck in the analog era), highlighting the value in identifying the priority works in need of digitization, and fostering a framework that emphasizes access.

Yet despite its laudable goals, the draft strategy suffers from timidity. It avoids taking positions on many controversial yet crucial policy issues including preservation of public domain works, the digitization of "orphan works" where the works are still protected by copyright but the creator's whereabouts are unknown, and the development of a fair use approach to digitization and public access. The LAC will obviously not solve these issues alone, but if Canada's national library does not take a strong position on them, Canadians might rightly ask who will.

The strategy also suffers from its limited scope. Digitization of books and historical records is important, but groups like the CBC and the National Film Board, who should be working to digitize thousands of hours of Canadian film, television shows, and radio programs, are largely absent. By comparison, the Dutch government launched the [Images for the Future](#) digitization project in July, which plans to preserve, digitize, and provide access to 137,200 hours of video, 22,510 hours of film, 123,900 hours of audio, and 2.9 million photos.

Digitization is not rooted solely in history. The Man Booker Prize, one of the world's most prestigious literary awards, recently [announced](#) that it is working with publishers to offer free, digital versions of all six nominated books next year. Organizers hope that the initiative will capture new audiences - particularly in Asia and Africa - who may be unable to access the actual books. The major Canadian literary prizes, including the Governor-General Award and the Giller Prize, could do the same thing. Rather than racing to print a few thousand additional copies, the publishers could work with the award organizers to increase the size of the prize in return for free,

global access to digital versions of the Canada's best writing.

Federal and provincial governments should also contribute by digitizing and providing the public with access to older legal texts, government reports, and other commissioned research that is frequently stuck in analog form.

The LAC strategy opens by arguing that "digital information and networked technologies are key drivers of economic growth and social well-being in the 21st century. It is clear that the nations that nurture their digital information assets and infrastructure will prosper; those that do not will fall behind." Without vision and leadership on this issue, it is increasingly clear that Canada will slot into the latter group of countries that have fallen behind.