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Long Server: A Collaborative Web Site Toward Universal File Format Conversion

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Abstract:

We believe that in order to survive in the long term, digital data must be able to move around easily, both in hardware (to make copies for redundancy) and in software (converted between encodings and formats to stay comprehensible). We are starting the Long Server project to create tools to promote this notion of high "data mobility". One of the first of these tools is a collaborative Web site for digital file format converters. This site is intended to be a central place for information about all known file format converters. Users will be able to use search and browsing tools to figure out which converters they need and where to get them.

Discussion and documentation may be contributed by users and will be made searchable. To encourage good archival practices, the site will recommend formats that are likely to be long-lived and well documented. For converter developers and other contributors, converter records can be added, augmented, or updated collaboratively. This file format converter Web site is intended to be built and grown quickly. Our goal is to accumulate information that is as complete and rich as possible, rather than be vetted against a high standard of consistency. It is intended to be complementary to the Global Digital Format Registry project by both leveraging GDFR standards and practices, while serving as a "reconnaissance" project to discover where user needs and interests exist.

Bio:

Kurt Bollacker is the Digital Research Director of The Long Now Foundation, whose mission is to foster long-term thinking and responsibility. He has a background in machine learning, large scale digital archiving, information retrieval, and digital libraries. He received a Ph.D. in Computer Engineering from The University of Texas at Austin and was co-creator of the CiteSeer scientific literature search engine while a researcher at The NEC Research Institute. He was the technical director of The Internet Archive, and a biomedical research engineer at the Duke University Medical Center.