

Opening a new 'doomsday vault' in Svalbard

Sometime in the future, when the amount of "fake news" has become so large and complex the truth is unclear, one will be able to enter the data vault in Mine 3 and check the facts.

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Arctic World Archive is the name of the newcomer. The company Piql AS has worked with Store Norske for a year to create a new vault for storing irreplaceable national or global data of importance in Svalbard.

"The seed vault is a success," said Pål Berg, Store Norske's business development manager. "But it is not just seeds humanity needs safely stored for a long time."

'Unique environment'

Film is a key word for Piql. The Norwegian Archive Services currently has a strategy based on migration. That means digital information is moved to new technology as it is developed. It is expensive and laborious.

Piql asserts that can be solved by storing data on high-resolution film. And some of the best storage environments are found inside Svalbard's mountains.

"Svalbard is a unique area with the qualities we need," said Rune Bjerkestrand, the company's administrative director. "Today we are experiencing an increasingly troubled world and we also see that databases are threatened by cyber attacks. It can be very good at such a time to have an archive that exists isolated in a cold archive in a part of the world where there also is no military activity."

From Rio to Svalbard

Regardless of whatever technologies are developed for deciphering information, there will never be any technical problems reading the film



The entrance to the old seed vault in Mine 3, which was opened in 1984. The plan is to store data in a vault that is to be constructed in the mine. FOTO: Christopher Engås



CEO of Piql is coming to Svalbard in the end of March with the first customers for the Arctic World Archive. FOTO: Piql

which, in principle, can be read with a magnifying glass. Svalbardposten interviewed Bjerkestrand while he was in Brazil's largest city, Rio de Janeiro, for meetings involving the project.

"It looks like Brazil's National Archives will be our first big customer and we have already planned the first trip to Svalbard," he said. "Institutions in Mexico have also shown interest, so maybe we will come with two large customers in late March."

The two large countries, with a total population of more than 320 million people, both want to save their foundations for nation's most important documents in the new vault at Svalbard.

Pilot project

Store Norske received 375,000 kroner this week from Innovation Norge to facilitate the data storage project. The mine's entryway will be cleared and cleaned, and an assessment will be made about whether the pilot plant will be based on storage containers or if the walls should be sprayed with concrete to create a desired environment. The plan is that the new warehouse will be located in the surface installation where the fire station is located.

Berg said it's not surprising the mine is an ideal space for Piql's project.

"The mine's entryway is valuable and storing things is an environmentally friendly business," he said. "The business is based on natural conditions and leaves no footprint."

Ultimate storage

Piql, based in Drammen, developed a revolutionary new way to convert digital sound and images to film reels in the early 2000s. Film is a storage medium that is absolute and indisputable, and the method was sold to the major film community worldwide.

If the company's plans go as desired, there will become a full installation on Svalbard in the long term. The company is in discussions with several operators worldwide to deliver a data storage service tailored to its basic technology.

"We envision staff locally who will be responsible for the ultimate security storage of documents," Bjerkestrand said. "And it should be possible to deliver information back to customers when it is needed."

'Exciting project'

Store Norske Administrative Director Wenche Ravlo said cooperation with Piql fits into her company's business plans.

"Using existing infrastructure in new businesses is part of the strategy," she said.

"The project is interesting from a pioneering perspective. It will be exciting to follow in the future."

Safety work



Business developer Pål Berg and CEO Wenche Ravlo in Store Norske are excited about the new project. The company received NOK 375.000 this week from Innovasjon Norge for developing the new vault. FOTO: Christopher Engås

On a trip into the main tunnel way in the disused Mine 3 there were visitors on a guided tour and a two-man team working to further secure the entryway.

According to Berg, the tunnel and surface installation need to be secure enough that is no danger from landslides or avalanches. The mine's atmosphere, which in the past had varying levels of oxygen, is not a factor for Piql's project.

"In general, the gases developed and were variable while the mine was in operation," Berg said. "Otherwise, they remain fairly stable. Moreover, the contents of the memory are packaged in such a way that it should not be sensitive to these environmental changes."

There have been occasional problems with water penetration into the Svalbard Global Seed Vault, but that is not expected to be a problem in Mine 3.

Challenging with Norway

Piql may be about to get a number of large international customers, but would like some Norwegian players on the pitch.

"It's not easy to be a prophet in your own land," Bjerkestrand said. "I hope that Norwegian players know what they have and become involved in this at some level. It will provide a signaling output to the world that will give the project a helping hand."

Bjerkestrand said data storage may also have larger market than the seed vault.

"Seeds are quite passive and it takes a lot before you have to use the vault for anything other than storage," he said. "Here we are talking about storing information to a greater extent than seeds that must be consulted from time to time."

Translated by Mark Sabbatini

Nyheter finner du her:

<http://svalbardposten.no/nyheter/engelsk/opening-a-new-doomsday-vault-in-svalbard/19.8254>