CRAFTED TOOLS / SELECTED WRITING

Preserving Knowledge

Keirn · Greta Penney · 25 July 2026



Photo by Benjamin White on Unsplash

It’s not unusual for someone in an organization to ask the surprisingly difficult question.

“Didn’t we already solve this?”

Sometimes the answer is sitting in a document no one remembers exists. Other times it lives in a thread from three years ago, or it disappeared when a contractor finished a project, or when someone retired, or when a laptop was replaced. In some cases the answer still exists, but only in the memory of the one person who remembers why a decision was made in the first place.

Most organizations don't lose knowledge dramatically, in one big moment. They lose it gradually, through perfectly ordinary work.

A project ends. A folder is archived. A naming convention changes. A team reorganizes. New software is introduced. Another repository is created because it solves an immediate problem. Before long, years of thoughtful work have been distributed across documents, drives, databases, design files, repositories, notebooks, and conversations, each preserving one small piece of a much larger story.

It’s not really a technical problem. It’s simply what happens.

You could say organizations can be good at creating knowledge and inconsistent at keeping it intact.

That may sound like an odd distinction. Organizations have no shortage of places to store information. Most could probably produce every document they have written over the last decade. Storage has become inexpensive, reliable, and almost invisible.

What is much harder to preserve is context.

Why a decision was made. How an idea evolved. Which prototype came first. What research informed a particular framework. Whether a methodology represents the current thinking of an organization or an experiment that was abandoned years ago. The relationships between these things often matter as much as the things themselves.

Libraries understand this. Museums get it. Archives certainly do. None of them exist simply to collect objects. They preserve provenance, relationships, authorship, chronology, significance, and change over time. A painting without attribution is something different from a painting with a history. An artifact without context loses much of what made it valuable in the first place.

A keep protects what matters most. A cairn marks the way.

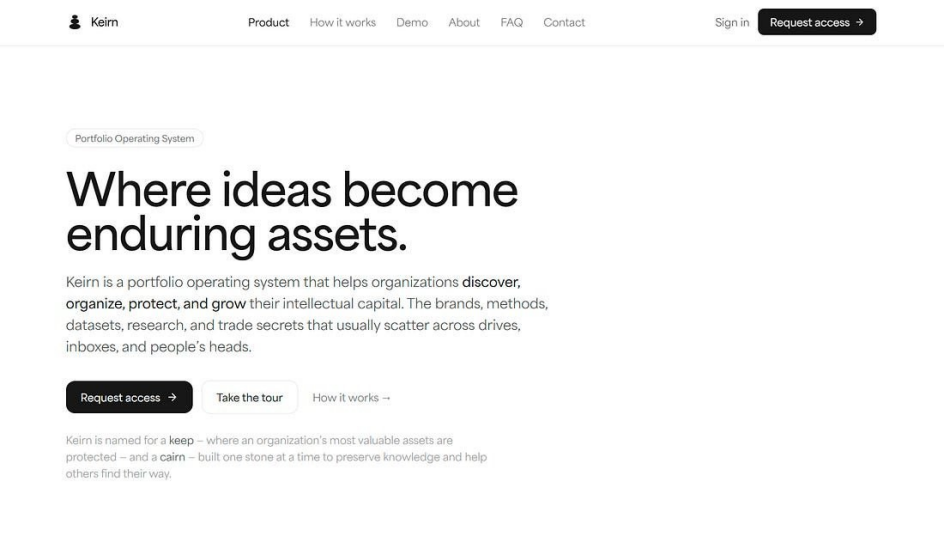
Organizations create collections too, but they don't tend to think of them that way.

Research accumulates. Design systems evolve. Product decisions build upon earlier decisions. Customer insights are refined. Internal methods become repeatable frameworks. Trade secrets, datasets, inventions, and processes slowly become part of an organization's intellectual fabric. None of this feels particularly remarkable on a Tuesday afternoon. Viewed over ten years, however, it begins to resemble a collection every bit as valuable as the physical collections we instinctively protect elsewhere.

So I decided to make Keirn.

Organizations already have countless places to keep documents. A system designed to preserve the knowledge that grows around them proved much harder to find.

The name reflects that concept. A keep is the protected heart of a castle. A cairn is built one stone at a time, each stone preserving a path for the people who come after. Both seemed like useful metaphors for knowledge that grows over time and becomes more valuable precisely because it remains connected to everything around it.



Keirn App

Organizations are producing extraordinary amounts of intellectual capital. Five or ten years from now, the question won't be whether they created enough of it. It will likely be whether anyone can still understand what was created, why it mattered, and where the next person should begin.

Keirn is a knowledge stewardship platform designed to help organizations preserve, organize, and build upon their intellectual capital. It connects research, methodologies, product ideas, intellectual property, strategic decisions, design systems, institutional knowledge, and operational expertise so that ideas
retain their context, relationships, and history as they evolve.

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