

The Impact of Open Source Library Resource Management Systems

Open source integrated library system (ILS) products currently find use in a relatively modest portion of libraries in the United States, but the numbers continue to show a gentle upward trend. Of the 9,493 public libraries (17,276 branches) in the United States represented in libraries.org, 582 (815 branches) use some version of Koha, and 635 use Evergreen (1,273 branches). This total of 1,217 libraries means that 12.8 percent of public libraries in the United States use an open source ILS. Of the 3,045 academic libraries in the United States, 128 use Koha, and 35 use Evergreen for a total of 163 or 5.4 percent.

The figures give evidence that open source ILSs have become an important part of the library technology landscape. In the United States and Canada, the impact has been moderate, but a growing part of the competitive environment. In the early days of open source ILS products, a dramatic shift seemed possible. Libraries expressed heightened concerns with some of the vendors of proprietary software, and there were signs that there was the possibility for more of a wholesale turn toward open source alternatives. But fifteen years later, proprietary products continue to dominate, with open source alternatives holding a relatively small minority position. But the impact goes beyond the implementation numbers. The presence of open source has increased competitive pressures on the commercial offerings to moderate pricing, accelerate development, and improve support services.

To date, large academic libraries have not implemented open source ILSs or library services platforms in large numbers. The Quali OLE project sparked considerable interest but ultimately failed to produce a viable product. The new FOLIO initiative has attracted even larger interest, but it remains to be seen if this

interest will eventually translate into implementations once the software has been completed.

Open source software has made a positive impact on the library technology industry. Many libraries have implemented systems based on open source software and are able to directly take advantage of its capabilities and can assess its value to them. These open source alternatives also have an impact on the overall industry. The mere presence of viable open source products represents an important competitive element. Open source software moderates cost across the board. Those offering proprietary products must take open source alternatives into consideration as they set pricing. Open source developers work hard to meet or exceed the capabilities of the established proprietary products. Those producing the proprietary products likewise must continually improve their systems and find ways to meet the expectations of flexibility and interoperability available in the open source realm.

References and Resources

- Albee, Barbara, and Hsin-liang Chen. "Public Library Staff's Perceived Value and Satisfaction of an Open Source Library System." *Electronic Library* 32, no. 3 (2014): 390–402.
- Breeding, Marshall. "The Current State of Privacy and Security of Automation and Discovery Products." *Library Technology Reports* 52, no. 4 (2016): 13–28, 3.
- . "EBSCO Supports New Open Source Project in Partnership with Quali OLE." *Smart Libraries Newsletter* 36, no. 5 (May 2016): 1–2.

- . “Equinox Shifts to Non-Profit Status.” *Smart Libraries Newsletter* 37, no. 2 (February 2017): 4–5.
- . “A Progress Report on Library Services Platforms.” *Smart Libraries Newsletter* 36, no. 8 (August 2016): 2–7.
- . “Simon Fraser University Ends Development of CUFTS.” *Smart Libraries Newsletter* 36, no. 11 (November 2016): 6–7.
- . “TIND Technologies and Invenio: A New Model of Automation for Research Libraries.” *Smart Libraries Newsletter* 35, no. 8 (August 2015): 2–5.
- . (2009). “The Viability of Open Source ILS.” *Bulletin of the American Society for Information Science and Technology (Online)* 35, no. 2 (December/January 2009): 20–25. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bult.2008.1720350207>.
- Pruett, Joseph, and Namjoo Choi. “A Comparison between Select Open Source and Proprietary Integrated Library Systems.” *Library Hi Tech* 31, no. 3 (2013): 435–54. <https://doi.org/10.1108/LHT-01-2013-0003>.
- Singh, Vandana. “Expectations versus Experiences: Librarians Using Open Source Integrated Library Systems.” *Electronic Library* 32, no. 5 (2014): 688–709.