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The open-source ILS

More dream than reality

Last month, *Smart Libraries Newsletter* suggested that the era of rapid integrated library system (ILS) development is over. Vendors appear to be opting for the new revenue of stand-alone products and services instead of the overhead and low margins of enhancing the traditional ILS. Interoperability among disparate products is the trend that will likely beat out the truly integrated system.

Only a love of irony can explain why the very trend that promises new revenues and continued corporate growth in the library vendor marketplace also is the cause célèbre of the open-source software (OSS) community in libraries. The ILS era is not over, they might argue, but just beginning, with a suite of truly integratable and interoperable library modules.

OSS has its roots in the earliest days of software development. It promotes the freedom to modify and implement software in any fashion deemed reasonable by the user. Moreover, OSS attempts to leverage the collaboration of several programmers to combat common software problems. Freedom, however, does not always mean free from cost, either in expertise or for the software package itself. Some popular OSS applications in libraries include Apache (Web server), Linux (operating system), and DSpace (institutional repository).

So why hasn't an open-source ILS caught on? Most likely because libraries are reluctant to be early adopters of such nascent library

software. With the notable exception of Koha, no open-source ILS software has been fully implemented by a library.

The ILS advantage

Though expensive to purchase and maintain, the commercial ILS offers full functionality. Moreover, much of the initial cost of a commercial ILS includes data conversion, something that few, if any, open-source solutions tackle.

Other oversights of the OSS community exist as well. Libraries pay high maintenance costs to ILS vendors not only for frontline—and often turnkey—support of the software, but also to ensure continued development of the software. Although some OSS ILS developers offer support (along the model of commercial open-source ventures such as Redhat Linux), the developed-in-our-spare-time nature of open-source software does not lend itself to assurances of longevity or high-end support.

Successful software also requires more than good code. Without open-source documentation, open-source marketing (take a look at those product names), and an open-source help desk, an OSS ILS has little chance of being used by any but the smallest of libraries.

Regardless, hope exists. ILS vendors should watch the open-source community carefully, not only to learn

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BLOGS and WIKIS

TECHNOLOGIES FOR COMMUNICATION

Blogs and wikis may sound like children's toys, but these useful, Web-based communications tools offer many potential uses in libraries.

You read a blog (short for weblog) like any other Web page, by pointing your browser to its URL. Topical blogs are a good source of current information and can reveal trends or controversies before they appear in other media. Authoring or contributing to a weblog can raise a person's name recognition in the community and be seen as a form of professional service.

Your library can use blogging software as a simple, inexpensive form of content management for its website. Blogging is an easy way for staff to post events, programs, notices, and community information to the public. Blogs can be used to note new acquisitions, reading recommendations from staff, and any other information that is compatible with a chronological format.

www.sls.lib.il.us

The Suburban Library System, a regional library system in northern Illinois, uses a blog for its home page.

Community blogs that allow multiple contributors to post items can be used as a vehicle for staff communication. In this case, the blog offers the ease of e-mail with the advantages of the Web (ease of lookup, no need to maintain mailing lists). A library could host a blog for the use of the Friends of the

Library or other booster groups. Blogging also could be incorporated into library-based programming, such as book clubs and activities for teens.

So many weblogs are devoted to library-related topics that Google has a directory category for them. The blogs range from the personal musings of library school students to serious news journals. Some are adjuncts to websites or more formal publications, such as the Scholarly Electronic Publishing Weblog, which notes new resources that will be added to the Scholarly Electronic Publishing Bibliography, and the Internet Scout Weblog, which blogs (or collects) resources of interest that are not in its scope.

Many blogs also are available as Rich Site Summary (RSS) feeds that can be read with news aggregator applications. Dozens of good free news aggregators are available; some work as Web applications and others as desktop clients. Some applications, such as Blogger, are available online and will host Web pages for bloggers who don't have their own websites. Others, such as the popular Radio UserLand, run as desktop clients.

Blogging software tends to be easy to install and use, and free or inexpensive. Bloggers do not need to know how to program or write HTML.

The collaborative wiki

As with blogs, wikis can be run locally or hosted by a central Internet site. Many versions of free wiki software are available

BLOGS AND WIKIS DEFINED

A blog, or weblog, is a Web-based journal of short, dated entries in reverse chronological order. Most blogs focus on one subject area and are updated daily. Entries typically consist of links to external Web pages with a summary of or commentary on the content. Entries older than a week or so are moved from the main page into an archive. To blog is to create a weblog or add items to a weblog.

A wiki is a website designed for collaborative use. It is updated using simple browser forms. Wiki pages can be created and updated instantly without any knowledge of programming or HTML. Wiki content is stored in a database and translated to HTML for display. Wiki is derived from wiki-wiki, the Hawaiian word for "quick-quick".—*PLC*

for local installation, including Swiki, PHP Wiki, TWiki, and Zwiki. These applications vary in the features they offer, the languages they are written in, and the ease of installation. Swiki is simplest to install and use.

A library could use a wiki as an online question-and-answer board, a suggestion box, or a place for readers to share information about their favorite books. The National Science Digital Library (NSDL) uses wiki technology in its communications portal to provide collaborative workspaces for its project teams. Wikis are particularly useful for collaborative authoring of documents. Committees that meet by conference call may find a wiki a good alternative to more expensive and complex network meeting software.

The line between wikis and blogs is fine and getting finer. Blogs are primarily publishing tools that also can be used for collaboration, and wikis are primarily tools for collaboration that also can be used for publishing. Both functionally and

technically, blogs and wikis are coming closer together. Many wikis now incorporate blogging features, and some weblogs have wiki plug-ins.

These technologies are here to stay, however they may evolve. Librarians should consider how they can best take advantage of them.—*Priscilla L. Caplan*

Contact: Peter Scott maintains a list of library weblogs organized geographically at www.libdex.com/weblogs.html

LIBRARY-RELATED BLOGS

Catalogablog

catalogablog.blogspot.com

Cataloging, classification, metadata, subject access, and related topics

The Education Librarian

www.educationlibrarian.com

For librarians working with students and faculty in post-secondary education

FOS News

www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/fosblog.html

Peter Suber's news from the free online scholarship movement

The Reader's Connection

www.glenview.lib.il.us/RABlog

News, reviews, and information about the world of books and reading by the Glenview Public Library

The Resource Shelf

resourceshelf.freeprint.com

Resources and news for information professionals—*PLC*

CHEAP OR FREE TOOLS FOR WIKIS AND BLOGS

AmphetaDesk

www.disobey.com/amphetadesk

Free news aggregator for Windows and Macs

Blogger

www.blogger.com

Web-based blogging tool

Daypop

www.daypop.com

Like a specialized Google, it indexes 35,000 news sites, RSS feeds, and weblogs

LiveJournal

www.livejournal.com

Free hosted weblogs

NewsIsFree

www.newsisfree.com

Configurable online news aggregator with more than 5,800 sources

Radio UserLand

<http://radio.userland.com>

An inexpensive desktop weblog publishing tool for Windows and Macs

SeedWiki

www.seedwiki.com

Hosted wikis for free noncommercial use

Swiki

<http://minnow.cc.gatech.edu/swiki>

Download the Open Source Swiki server—*PLC*

EBSCO COMPLETES ROWECOM PURCHASE AS LIBRARIES AWAIT RELIEF

In June, Ebsco Industries, Inc., completed its acquisition of the U.S. operations of RoweCom, Inc., which includes the operations of Dawson, Inc.; Dawson Information Quest, Inc.; The Faxon Co., Inc.; Turner Subscription Agency, Inc.; McGregor Subscription Service, Inc.; and Corporate Subscription Services, Inc. This acquisition follows that of RoweCom's European operations by Ebsco and the withdrawal of Swets Blackwell from an attempt to acquire RoweCom back in January.

In possibly the biggest subscription fiasco in library history, RoweCom parent Divine, Inc., failed to either pay publishers for content or refund the cost to subscribing libraries. The company's business failures ultimately resulted in the bankruptcy of Divine, which owned 90 technology companies and squandered more than \$500 million of its investors' money.

Ebsco is working quickly to make good on RoweCom's failures by negotiating deals with libraries and publishers to pay publishers or refund libraries.

Allegations from RoweCom's creditors claim that more than \$70 million in library payments were diverted to fund other company operations. Several reports, such as those in the *Washington Post*, point to bankruptcy court documents that describe the transfer of funds. Former RoweCom president Andrew "Flip" Filipowski denies this allegation, stating that Divine put more money into RoweCom than it took out. Filipowski blames the RoweCom acquisition on the failure of Divine.

Since the debacle, Filipowski, who lives in North Carolina, has invested in a minor league baseball team and started SilkRoad Technology. The new company has already acquired several of Divine's former assets at auction. Libraries can only hope that Filipowski will steer clear of the library industry in his latest venture.—AKP



Dream from page 1

about desired functionality but also because the promise of true interoperability is more likely to occur in the open-source community than among competing software vendors. Although commercial vendors offer interoperability, that interoperability is more often than not only within their own systems, or through the implementation of lowest common denominator features for metasearch interfaces or image management.

A posting to the oss4lib discussion list suggested that a perfect world of the open-source ILS meant that each module would be a black box, separate and complete with respect to other modules, all interoperating through open protocols and application programming interfaces (APIs). Although open protocols and APIs are evolving, they are hardly hot trends; a modular focus from commercial *and* open source library systems, however, is both alarming and intriguing.

The development is alarming because the history of the ILS is seemingly repeating itself; the moderately interoperable systems of the 1970s, after all, gave rise to the ILS of today. The development is intriguing because, if achieved, dependence on a single vendor for the bulk of a library's automation could become the exception rather than the rule.

The open-source ILS is attempting to gain ground at the same time that library automation vendors are shifting it. While commercial vendors attempt to put the ILS on a shelf and move outside the box to develop new products and markets, the open-source community strives to complete the work that commercial vendors never accomplished in the traditional integrated system. The clash of these two strategies—is the ILS done, or just beginning?—will prove interesting to watch.—
Andrew K. Pace

OSS: What's out there?

An early champion of open-source software (OSS) in libraries, Daniel Chudnov, a primary developer of DSpace at MIT, started Open Source Systems for Libraries in early 1999. The website and its accompanying electronic discussion list include dozens of open-source projects, including:

Avanti

www.avantibrarysystems.com

Avanti MicroLCS began in 1998 and remains under development by a single programmer, Peter Schlupf. Not yet publicly available, despite several promises of its impending release, Avanti remains in Version 1.0 Beta.

Koha

www.koha.org

Generally considered to be the first open-source ILS, Koha recently released Version 1.9.2. Koha is developed in New Zealand and includes the basic library system modules, including acquisitions for smaller libraries. It is designed to be platform-independent using open-source software.

LearningAccess

www.learningaccess.org/website/techdev/ils.php

Formerly known as OpenBook, LearningAccess is undergoing testing and is not yet available to the general public. Though based on the Koha code, the system is different and it supports MARC record conversion. The system offers circulation, cataloging, and an OPAC module.

OpenBiblio

obiblio.sourceforge.net

Another single-developer solution, Dave Stevens' OpenBiblio is released through the open-source software portal sourceforge.net. Beta Version 0.4.0 includes OPAC, circulation, cataloging, and administration modules.—AKP

Contact: www.oss4lib.org



Tutor.com acquires virtual reference tools

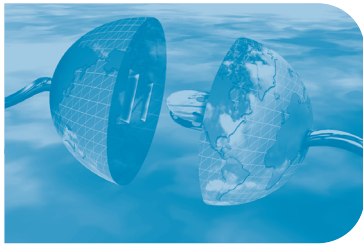
Tutor.com has acquired the Reference Division of Library Systems and Services, Inc. (LSSI), including LSSI Virtual Reference Toolkit™, Web Reference Services, and LSSI Integrated Reference Management System with RefTracker™. Under the arrangement, LSSI becomes a minor shareholder in Tutor.com, and Arthur Brady, formerly vice president of LSSI's Reference Division, becomes vice president and general manager of the new Tutor.com Reference Division.

Tutor.com is the provider of Live Homework Help™, a service that connects grade 4-12 students with subject instructors in real time over the Web. Tutor.com markets primarily to public library systems, although it also is available to educational institutions and individuals.

LSSI was one of the major for-profit vendors of software for virtual, or digital, reference. The Virtual Reference Toolkit has been integrated into several library systems, including Sirsi iBistro, Dynix Horizon, and Gaylord Polaris. LSSI's Web Reference Center provided all-hours reference service as a backup or adjunct to in-house library reference staff.

The acquisition should strengthen Tutor.com's ties to the library market while helping libraries to provide complementary reference and educational services. The two companies had much in common beyond the provision of live question-answering services. Homework help and virtual reference use many of the same technologies, such as whiteboard technology, document sharing, and Internet chat. If Tutor.com can leverage the similarities of the two services, expect interesting product offerings in the future.—PLC

Contact: www.tutor.com



Standards in the news

Sagebrush earns SIF Agent certification

Sagebrush Corp.'s SIF Agent is the first library automation product to receive certification through the Schools Interoperability Framework (SIF) Compliance Program. SIF is an initiative of more than 100 companies and school districts. Its goal is to develop a technical framework for K-12 software to enable data sharing among different applications such as library media centers, student administration, food service, and transportation.

Sagebrush SIF Agent allows additions and changes to student information made in nonlibrary applications to automatically update the library's patron records, saving staff time and improving the accuracy and currency of information. SIF Agent works with Sagebrush Athena 9.x and Spectrum 5.x library automation systems.—PLC

Z39.50 news

The U.S. National Z39.50 Profile for Library Applications passed ballot and is now ANSI/NISO standard Z39.89 2003. The Z39.50 protocol for information retrieval allows so many options that library catalogs could be fully compliant with the protocol and still return poor or inconsistent results when searched through Z39.50. Z39.89 identifies a subset of the Z39.50 protocol that clients and servers must support to be compatible with each other. Libraries issuing RFPs should require library systems vendors to fully support Z39.89 for Z39.50 access to library catalogs.

The University of Utah Marriott Library has developed software that adds Z39.50 server capability to the CONTENTdm digital collections server. The software provides access to digital collections on CONTENTdm servers from Z39.50-compliant library portals and local catalogs. It is available for free downloading under the GNU General Public License.

R. R. Bowker's Books In Print and Global Books In Print databases now support Z39.50 access. Subscribing libraries can access these resources through any Z39.50-compliant library system, portal, or metasearch tool. Patrons can cross-search the Bowker products with other Z39.50 compliant databases.—PLC

Contact: www.niso.org
www.lib.utah.edu/digital/ZContent.html
www.bowker.com

NCBI releases formats for archiving

The National Center for Biotechnology Information of the National Library of Medicine (NCBI/NLM) has created a Journal Archiving and Interchange Document Type Definition (DTD) that should help standardize the reformatting of digital journal content for archiving.

The DTD provides a common format in which publishers and archives can exchange journal content in eXtensible Markup Language (XML). NCBI/NLM also created a Journal-Publishing DTD for authoring material for PubMed Central. Both DTDs as well as a suite of XML modules that define different types of journal issue content—such as articles, letters, and editorials—are available in the public domain.

The DTDs are partially based on work done by Harvard University and Inera, Inc., a part of a Mellon-funded pilot in archiving commercial e-journal content.

The free availability of these DTDs may encourage the standardization of journal submissions for publishing and archiving. Publishers, however, might be more comfortable adopting specifications that have been through a formal consensus-based standardization process and have a maintenance process defined.—PLC

Contact: <http://dtd.nlm.nih.gov>

Partnership a boon for content organization

Ex Libris (USA), Inc., and Net Snippets started a cooperative venture in June that will integrate the new Internet information management system into Ex Libris products Aleph 500, MetaLib portal, and SFX (for context-sensitive reference linking of Web resources). By incorporating the Snippets software into its products, Ex Libris hopes to add authority to Web and online material citations, and increase the market for its resource discovery tools.

Using the Internet Explorer Web browser, Net Snippets allows users to save distinct portions of Web pages, PDFs (portable document files), and image files, along with notes and bibliographic information in an interface that allows for collecting, saving, annotating, and organizing digital content. The system, designed for collaborative and personal information management, also allows for portability and e-mail functionality.

Ex Libris' incorporation of Net Snippets software will leverage its development of OpenURL for persistent access to resources, and its creation of persistent links to online catalog records.—*AKP*

THE NAME REMAINS THE SAME

After three years of intense debate, marketing discussions, and lobbying, the Special Libraries Association supporters failed to amass the required votes to change its nearly 100-year-old name in June. With only a majority of the vote, not the two-thirds required, members rejected the name Information Professionals International.

With 890 members voting and 120 members not voting, the name change lost by only 73 votes. Librarian Stephen Abram, vice president, corporate development at Micromedia ProQuest, chaired a three-year taskforce charged with the organization's branding. Although disappointed, he was encouraged by all the member discussions that took place. The debate within the SLA is indicative of a profession struggling with the L-word (library, librarian, libraries) and trying to define itself to its clientele.—*AKP*

E-books no more

In late June, Gemstar-TV Guide International announced it was abandoning the market for electronic book content and devices (the REB1100 and REB1200). Content sales ceased on July 16, but previously purchased e-books will remain available from Gemstar for three years.

The decision represents the worst-case scenario of what can happen when an organization pairs proprietary e-book content with a proprietary reading device. Libraries are faced with a difficult situation regarding e-book acquisitions and lending because Gemstar's product was one of the few remaining dedicated reading devices.

Dozens of libraries own devices and titles affected by the Gemstar decision. Gemstar had still not addressed the functionality issues (e.g., the inability to move e-book content from one device to another) that distinguished the library market from Gemstar's almost exclusive consumer market. Gemstar's new CEO, Jeff Shell, says Gemstar will rid itself of all its noncore operations, which include all nonmedia concerns including e-books.

In a related story, the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) filed fraud charges against former Gemstar CEO Henry Yuen.—*AKP*



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