My contention is that NFC is an important part of a stack of technologies that will keep brick-and-mortar libraries vibrant and in-demand even as e-materials claim more and more collection development time and money.

Inspired by Near Field Communication

By Oleg Kagan
West Hollywood Library

Imagine a book display for ebooks, a display that replaces titles automatically from a queue preset by a librarian. A patron approaches the screen, taps the cover to see the book's description, and then checks the book out by placing their smartphone near that same area. Maybe I'm dreaming, but with a technology that allows smartphones to be used for self-checkout or as a charge card for printing, is simpler than Bluetooth (no pairing necessary), and quicker than QR codes, I can't stop myself from thinking of ways libraries can benefit.

Near Field Communication (or NFC), an off-shoot of Radio Frequency Identification (RFID), has been around for nearly a decade, but really took off within the past year with the unveiling of Google Wallet, an application that allows customers to make purchases using their smartphones. As ownership of smartphones expands (46% of Americans and rising as of March 2012, according to Pew) and NFC sees more applications, it stands to reason that within a few years most of our patrons will have the capability to make use of this technology in a library setting.

Perhaps the cautious library technologist may hesitate to embrace NFC because it doesn't solve a specific problem. Why, after all, should she spend staff time and effort on fiddling with a concept that has possible privacy and security flaws? Why create something wonderful and then wait a year or two for the masses to obtain their NFC-enabled devices? My contention is that NFC is an important part of a stack of technologies that will keep brick-and-mortar libraries vibrant and in-demand even as e-materials claim more and more collection development time and money.

While physical books will surely remain an important fixture of our reading diets, there is no denying the rise of digital stuff. Though cyberpunks and minimalists may embrace the withdrawal of information objects from the "meatspace", I believe that library spaces will at some point in the future be filled with distribution devices serving semi-analog representations of digital collections. If only to save the serendipity of browsing, these devices will, like the display board mentioned in the introduction, allow librarians to curate their digital objects down to where in the library they are displayed. What is the problem this is solving? That currently, in my beautiful new public library, the only way patrons can see available ebooks is by sticking their faces into an OPAC.

But wait, am I forgetting the licensing (read: user experience) mess that ebooks currently represent? In fact, I am not. I propose making use of the vast amount of public domain resources that are available in .epub format as an experimental collection. Figuring out how these intangible items could be displayed and transferred to a patron's device with a wave may start with tags pasted on the shelves and continue with holographic representations of items à la Minority Report, and beyond starts with small-scale hacking projects of "hot" spaces on screens, NFC, beautiful designs that draw patrons to look, and, of course, interesting ebooks arranged tastefully.

Just as this article started with a focus on near field communication, any class of trending technology could just as well summon a similar brainstorm. However, despite my thunder-and-lightning thoughts, no tinkerer's workshop has sprung up (like a rainbow) around me to make my library dreams come true. My hope is that the same cannot be said for the present and future library labs of California; that there are out there librarians in lab coats actually creating marvelous furniture near which we will be able to wave our phones and get a book.

WordPress or Drupal?

by Suzanna Conrad,
IT Interest Group Chair

I've had experience working with WordPress and Drupal both professionally and personally. Each of these open source software alternatives have their advantages and disadvantages. If these are the two options you're considering for your website, your choice really just depends on what you want to accomplish with your website, how scalable the solution should be and how savvy you are with web technologies. I've listed some of the advantages and disadvantages that I have personally experienced between the two software options below. For a more exhaustive look at advantages and disadvantages of both WordPress and Drupal, you may want to look at the following blog entry from Kevin Dees.

> *I've listed some of the advantages and disadvantages that I have personally experienced between the two software options…*

WordPress

I started using WordPress in 2008 on a personal blog. After years of maintaining websites with Dreamweaver and FrontPage, I wanted something that was easier to update and provided a more streamlined look and feel on my website. WordPress seemed like a great alternative. The installation required only a modest amount of technical understanding and I had my site up and running within a few hours. There were some tweaks I had to make to the theme of the site, but I found plenty of documentation to assist me through this process, which was neither difficult nor time consuming.

Advantages:

- Easy and quick installation.
- User-friendly admin features.
- Installing plugins is also easy and not problematic.
- Great for a simple blog.

Disadvantages:

- Harder to manage user groups.
- More difficult to incorporate certain complex structures.
- No command level features such as "drush" (Drupal).

Drupal

I began using Drupal at a public library recently and was amazed at how simple it was to incorporate certain elements into the page, specifically jQuery lightboxes. A few months later I had to develop an instructional website in Drupal at a position with an academic library. After a bit of research (mostly from searching the Drupal forums), I was able to incorporate some great jQuery and CSS features into the website. Since then I've almost exclusively used Drupal for my personal sites as well.

Advantages:

- With technical knowledge and savvy, content can be handled in complex ways, especially with certain modules such as CCK and Views.
- Easy to manage user groups.
- Command level features using "drush."

Disadvantages:

- In order to use even something as simple as a WYSIWYG editor, you'll have to install a module – and understanding the module structure in Drupal and how to install modules may require a learning curve depending on your level of technical savvy. Also choosing one module over another may open a can of worms; sticking to very popular modules will ensure that support will be continued on those specific modules.
- Updates can be very difficult to install, especially as not all modules will be supported immediately.

Both WordPress and Drupal will have a wealth of pre-configured themes that you can either purchase or use for free – these can also in some cases simplify your development process. Also, your web-hosting provider may provide control panel tools for quick installation of either software. The software you choose to use really just depends on what you'd like to do with your website and how much technical knowledge you have or are willing to acquire. If all you'd like to do is update a simple blog, WordPress might be the way to go. If you're a developer, you might find that Drupal is far more beneficial for your purposes.

So which open software would be more appropriate for your library? This really just depends on the purpose of your website and in some cases your system. WordPress is generally simpler, which works well for blogs and basic websites. A WordPress website is ideal for such purposes as highlighting events, supporting adult programming such as a book club, or for a teen blog. Drupal is capable of handling all of these things as well, however will require more effort in the beginning to get the system and all necessary modules installed. Since Drupal is a content management system, in the long term you will have more flexibility so if you're looking at using Drupal for more than just a website, i.e. to manage taxonomy, implement link resolvers or integrate third party systems such as your ILS, Google Books API, or import MARC records, you'll be better off making the commitment to the steeper Drupal learning curve. For more information on Drupal library modules and library implementations.

WEB OF LANGUAGES

Ever wonder what the programmers are talking about when they mention AJAX? Have you heard of jQuery but aren't entirely sure what it is or what it does? Are you interested in learning more about usability in web design? Attend the webinar "Web of Languages: An Introduction to Usability and Developing Web Applications with AJAX and jQuery" on May 30, 2012 from 1:00pm-4:00pm PDT to find out more.

Details: "Web of Languages" introduces the basic to early intermediate librarian, library staff member, student, web developer or administrator to usability, as well as developing applications with AJAX and jQuery. Derek Christiansen, Web Technologist for San Jose State University School of Library and Information Science, will define AJAX and present a number of SJSU applications of AJAX; Cary Gordon of the Cherry Hill Company will discuss the uses of jQuery in web development; and Sarah Houghton, Acting Director of San Rafael Public Library, will provide perspective on web usability with an overview of web development techniques for library websites and web applications. The purpose of the program is to introduce these technologies and techniques so that librarians and library staff can better understand and visualize what is possible using these web development techniques.

Early bird registration (Mail-in registrations must be received by the CLA office by 5pm, May 15, to receive the early-bird registration rate):

   $35 non-members
   $25 CLA members
   $20 student members

After May 15:

   $45 non-members
   $35 CLA members
   $30 Student member

Can't make the event? Register to access the webinar after the event:

   $25 (members and non-members)

Registration and full program information is available on CLA's website

Deadline: May 29, 2012

Questions: Contact Suzanna Conrad or Stephanie Roach

Program sponsored by the California Library Association's
Information Technology and Technical Services Interest Groups

Considering Joomla!?

By Mellanie Reeve
IT Interest Group
Newsletter Editor

Considering Joomla! as an open source content management system (CMS) for a library website? Like any open source content management system, Joomla! has its positives and negatives. The most daunting of which is learning the CMS and troubleshooting any problems yourself, though there are online forums where you can search for information and post support questions. Initially the biggest consideration should be is there a librarian who has the time necessary to learn, develop, and troubleshoot any issues that arise?

If you are relatively new to website design and technology there are several reputable companies that provide web hosting, support, and templates to create a Joomla! website. If you have more experience, you can build the site from the basic Joomla! core, allowing for customization of the look and functionality of the site. Templates can be purchased from several different companies, which allow for color and layout customization which I highly recommend.

Some basic knowledge of HTML and CSS is a definitely necessary when working with Joomla!. Intermediate to advanced knowledge is better as there are times when you will have to go in and tweak the code in order to custom-

ize the color scheme or display. I have a background with web design, so the most difficult aspect for me was understanding the layout and functionality of the Joomla! administrator control panel.

The administrator control panel information is clearly laid out, with headings such as Users, Menus, Content, Components, and Extensions. For me the biggest learning curve was understanding the relationship between those different areas and how, for example, you control the article layout style (single article or Category Blog) through the Main Menu Manager. The main area where you control and add functionality is in the Module Manager, which allows you to incorporate extensions within specific webpages (such as an image gallery, a calendar, a menu, a wrapper, etc.), thereby increasing your website's functionality.

Extensions are downloadable programs that add additional functionality to your Joomla! website. For instance, the website I was working on needed several different functions met that were not part of Joomla!'s core, such as a calendar function, a photo gallery function, and a name directory. Extensions are available for free or paid and are created by individuals and small businesses. Because no larger organization is overseeing the quality of the extensions, they vary in degrees of success in performing the functions they profess to and

they must be tested and evaluated individually before incorporating in a live website. An issue to consider when using extensions is that they are not always updated congruently with the Joomla! core, due to the fact that they are independently developed. Having a second mirrored website set up to integrate and test extensions, as well as Joomla! core updates, is an invaluable tool and I would highly recommend it as opposed to incorporating them directly within a live website, as it is risky and can cause layout and functionality issues.

From my experiences working with Joomla! I would highly recommend it. It definitely takes some work and trial and error, but it is a well supported open source CMS with hundreds of extensions and thousands of users.

Advantages:
- Fairly quick to learn and install
- Large support community
- Ability to manage user groups

Disadvantages:
- Less control in customization than with Drupal
- Need to choose and install extensions to add functionality
- Extensions not always updated

I would highly recommend it. It definitely takes some work and trial and error, but it is a well supported open source CMS with hundreds of extensions and thousands of users.

Get Active with the IT Interest Group!

Are you interested in getting more involved in the Information Technology Interest Group? We're looking for members who would like to assist with upcoming events on all different levels including event planning, publicity for events and the group or strategic planning. Whether you'd like to add some experience to your resume, network or just learn more about new technologies, your help could be invaluable.

Please email suzanna@terabytelibrarian.com if you're interested in getting more involved. Students are welcome!

Suzanna Conrad
IT Interest Group Chair

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Our Mission:
To evaluate past, current, and future technology trends to improve the IT experience for both library patrons and library staff.

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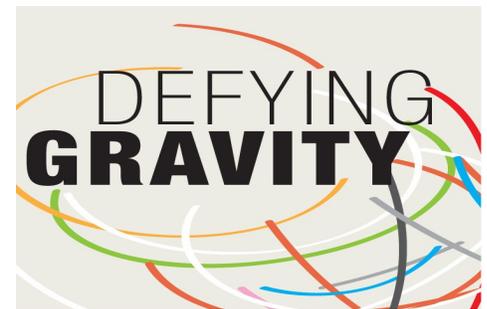
We want to hear from you!

Submissions: due Monday, October 15th.

Publish date: Monday, October 29th.

Please send submissions for upcoming issues to the editors at itignewsletter@gmail.com.

Articles should be between 200-500 words in length; pictures (with captions) are also accepted; and the article may receive editing upon entry into the newsletter. Exceptions can be made for longer articles, please contact the editors at itignewsletter@gmail.com to correspond.

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