

Open source library software in action

Philanthropy Australia's Resource Centre library has recently gone online, using a free open source integrated library system called Koha, developed in New Zealand [<http://www.koha.org>]. While the open source option initially seemed a potentially risky venture, it is now proving a success, which we are keen to share with the library community.

There are approximately 3000 items in Philanthropy Australia's Resource Centre library, focusing on philanthropy, foundations, grantmaking, corporate citizenship, the Australian non-profit sector, and a range of funding program areas. Our catalogue is now available via our website, <http://www.philanthropy.org.au/search/catalogue.html>.

The decision to use open source

When this project started in January 2001 Philanthropy Australia had a small uncatalogued 'library'. I began by looking at a range of traditional library software products, which all left me somewhat uninspired. We were using an IT consultant to assist us

in creating an integrated IT infrastructure for our organisation (encompassing an intranet, new website, library catalogue online, and an online directory). Because of the complex nature of this integrated IT project we were thinking outside the square, and it was the IT consultant who first suggested Koha — that we could spend our catalogue budget allocation on contributing to this open-source product, which can then be available for other libraries (including non-profits) to use. Now that was inspiring! It fits in nicely with our philosophy, within the spirit of philanthropy.

The open source model

Being in philanthropy, and being aware to some extent of the struggles for funding by non-profit organisations, and the wastage of duplicated services, the concept of free open-source software is so refreshing. There are many 'libraries', from local small non-profit organisations with grass-roots collections of resources, to collections of national significance in war-torn countries, for which purchasing a commercial application is sim-

ply not viable, whereas a free open-source library product is a fantastic solution.

Customising Koha

There was a considerable amount of work to do to get Koha looking and acting the way we wanted it, especially considering the relative ease with which we could have purchased and installed an existing product. The model put forward by Koha's developers in New Zealand, Katipo [<http://katipo.co.nz>], is the Horowhenua Library Trust catalogue, but being a public library OPAC, it was not readily transferable to a special library climate.

Our contribution to Koha entailed us paying Katipo to undertake two enhancements. These were: incorporating an abstract field into each record, and the integration of URLs into the catalogue, both as *the resource* being catalogued (that is, a website as the resource), and as *additional resources* pertaining to a print resource (for example, a URL for the online version of a print resource).

In addition to these enhancements we have customised the OPAC interface.

Currently the OPAC design, on all search and results screens, is very basic and not all that easy on the eye, so getting a graphic designer to work on the visual design is the next item on our 'to do' list.

Downloading our data

Our process was perhaps a bit different from the way other libraries have taken up Koha because we started off with a small uncatalogued collection. I outsourced the cataloguing of the collection to CAVAL, and they catalogued (inhouse) directly on to Kinetica while the Koha customisation work was undertaken. We then downloaded our records into Koha once our system was ready.

The future

I have been asked about the kind of return on investment we expect for the money we spent on the development of Koha. We don't expect a financial return; however, for Philanthropy Australia we have achieved two 'returns' — one tangible and one tacit. Firstly we have a searchable library catalogue, which is part of a dynamic and innovative development team providing free and frequent upgrades, and which offers membership of an active usergroup community [<http://koha.org/mailling/>]. Secondly Philanthropy Australia can claim a small measure of kudos, and I get a large measure of personal satisfaction, from our contribution to Koha. It feels as if it is a journey which we are just starting out on, but we are in for the long haul and very happy to talk to others who may be thinking of joining us.

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An open-source initiative

Christophe Augias, chief librarian, New-Caledonias Territorial Library

Koha is Maori for gift. Why gift? You may ask. The answer is that Koha is a free library database that anyone can download from the internet and use (<http://www.koha.org>). Koha is also open-source, which means you actually have the rights to change the software, thus allowing skilled people worldwide to work on a common project and keep it free! Linux is probably the best known open-source example, and it is now widely used throughout the world.

Koha was first developed in 1999, and the project has continued to gain momentum ever since.

The software was created by Katipo Communications Ltd for the Horowhenua Library Trust. The underlying idea of this company was to create a dynamic free database, which could be continually refined by users based anywhere in the world. The advantages of such an arrangement are obvious. The software is not only free, but also librarians are no longer held prisoner by their library system's supplier! And there is a whole community of users to help answer questions or problems.

Koha seems to be evolving at a regular and promising pace. After significant changes to the system, new versions are issued and Version 1.3 was released recently. Version 1.2.3 included templates

that allow for a translation of the software into other languages, thus opening the use of Koha to non-English speaking countries. Version 1.4 is already scheduled and will include improved Z.3950 functions and the use of different versions of the MARC format.

The power of the open-source initiative concept is thus to bring together skills and goodwill to create efficient free tools. Koha should be an important project for the South Pacific: just imagine a library integrated system at — nearly — no cost! A revolutionary concept.

Koha also demonstrates the best use we, as librarians, can make of the internet by sharing our skills and experience in order to help raise our professional standards for the benefit of our readers. We can all contribute by coding, advertising, or translating. The larger the community, the sooner we will see the results! Other pieces of free software could be created in the same manner, so those of us with internet access should keep an eye out for other initiatives and alert colleagues of these developments through the various means of communication.

Koha must be advertised widely in order to develop into a fully operational library system, and I have no doubt that this indeed will be achieved. ■