GENERAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Book reviews

Database-driven web sites

Ed. by Kristin Antelman. New York: Haworth Information Press, 2002. 133p. ISBN-10: 0 7890 1738 5 (hbk)

Price: US$48

(Published simultaneously as *Internet Reference Services Quarterly*, Vol. 7, Nos.1/2, 2002)

The content of this book covers mainly organising the information in your library to make it available to Internet users. It includes the range of software solutions that has emerged, and examines the challenges of using this software to develop web sites that make information access user-friendly. These web sites are all database-driven rather than HTML-dependent.

There are 9 chapters, all focusing on solving related technical problems, and promoting a library's own web site in order to expand the library's outreach. A variety of library situations are included – academic and governmental – ranging from complex, redesigned, team-driven web sites, to the "do-it-yourself" solutions requiring minimal equipment and staff.

Of the complex web sites, Karen Hein and Marc Davis, at the University of Nebraska's library, share the ups and downs of developing their web site using Research Wizard, a database web application that runs on an open source PHP/MySQL framework known as iDriver. The Research Wizard delivers customised content through the use of keywords. Despite initial user problems during development, the authors state that the Wizard has eased the frustrations of library web site maintenance, and that service to users is now more dynamic and responsive. The reactions from users and staff during the development process are useful for others thinking of planning similar tasks. The authors leave us with this thought, based on their experience: The challenge was to "think differently" and to get "inside the minds" of the users.

Karen Underhill and Bruce Palmer in "Archival content anywhere@anytime" describe their huge task of making a pilot web-based imaging database project (750 000 historical photos) a content-driven database that provides Internet access to all archival material at Northern Arizona University.

The principles and objectives of completely redesigning a state portal in the California State Library are examined by Kristine Ogilvie and John Jewell. The reader is taken through the evolving role of the library in the project, the questions a library should ask and answer before embarking on such a project, and then the benefits that such a project can bring. One can almost feel the enormous stress to be ready on time that everyone involved in the project endured as the deadline for completion drew near.

Laura Galván-Estrada, at the University of California, San Diego, undertook a web redesign project. This entailed developing a database of resources (known as SAGE), and the creation of various in-house tools to enter and edit the database. The benefits to the users and the library staff are emphasised, with numerous illustrations showing the step-by-step developments.

The HealthLinks web site at the University of Washington's Health Science Libraries took commercially available software, ColdFusion, to redevelop their web site. Brian Westra looks at the basic concepts of a web application, and goes on to describe some of the main features of the HealthLinks web application and site. This was to move their web application from being Java-based to the more flexible environment offered by ColdFusion (a relational database). The author stresses the importance of providing formal documentation for the web site. One of the most valuable capabilities of ColdFusion is its search facilities.

Mary Platt writes on extending information on periodical holdings and electronic resources at Kennesaw State Univerity's Sturgis Library using the skills, technologies and hardware that already existed in the library with Allaire's ColdFusion Express. This is a free, feature-limited version of the ColdFusion Web application server. It did involve relevant staff having to attend a ColdFusion course on SQL (Structured Query Language) to allow them to create the necessary ColdFusion scripting. However, the creation of dynamic database-driven web pages made it all worthwhile for this library

Just when you start to think that this is all too complicated and unrealistic for your small library, Ann Koopman at the Scott Memorial Library, Jefferson University, shows how bibliographic citation management software, such as Reference Manager, EndNote, ProCite (all ISIResearchSoft products), can be used for web applications. Using a combination of

Reference Manager and its companion, Reference Web Poster, the library is able to publish indexes to bibliographic literature, searchable lists of electronic journals, and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on its web site. She states that this approach is most suitable for materials of a bibliographic nature and/or for low budgets, and that the software is easy to install and use. Library users can download searches from, for example, Web of Science or PubMed and forward these to the library for possible inclusion in the database. However, she does also mention the limitations of these products.

So if you are searching for an alternative to HTML-based web sites for your library, this book will certainly give you food for thought. There are numerous illustrations provided, and the language is not too technical. Indirectly, you will be provided with helpful advice on what to do and what not to do through the practical experiences of those who have tackled database-driven web site development projects of varying complexities.

Reviewed by: Yvonne Blomkamp, Information Officer, UCT/MRC Research Unit for Exercise Science and Sports Medicine, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Cape Town.
Tel: +27 (21) 650 4579
Email: *yblomkam@sports.uct.ac.za*