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Creating an Internal Content Management System

When I became digital resources and reference/instruction librarian in 1999 at the Hekman Library at Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary, one of my first tasks was to redesign the library's web site. Like many of you who maintain web links to library resources, I quickly learned that offering access to a large number of resources from an even larger number of static web pages can never really be described as efficient or professionally fulfilling.

In recent years, many libraries have created dynamic web sites that are database-driven, that is, maintained and populated with content stored within what can be loosely termed a content management system (CMS). In 2001 Jed Koops, the Hekman Library systems programmer, and I created a CMS called Hobbes (library staff liked the play on words of "Calvin and Hobbes"). Since then Hobbes has grown into a hybrid of CMS and intranet to include not only web site content, but also a variety of internal tools used by librarians to help them complete some of their daily tasks.

The Hekman Library is a small academic library, serving over 4200 students, 370 faculty, and many community patrons. The majority of the library's 1,700,000 items (books, e-books, journals, e-journals, microfiche, government documents, etc.) are spread across 100,000 square feet over four floors. The library employs the full time equivalent of 17 staff, including eight professional librarians who also serve as liaisons to all of the college's 25 academic departments. Access to all library resources is

provided through the library's online catalog (Sirsi), a digital media archive (Sirsi), and the library's web site, the "Hekman Digital Library" (HDL). Since its creation in 1997, the HDL has grown from a mundane list of links and library information to become the primary point of access to all of the library's resources; in 2001 I created the current version of the HDL.

Calvin and Hobbes: Managing our Content Online

Hobbes is a web-based tool that uses Common Gateway Interface (CGI) scripts written in Perl to store, query, and return results from data stored in a series of related SQL tables. Because it is web-based, librarians can easily manage data without knowing Perl or SQL, and can authenticate into the system using the existing college's online directory. By authenticating through a continually updated college database of login names and passwords, we did not need to create our own. Users added to the Hobbes environment have immediate access without needing to remember yet another ID and password.

As a CMS, I initially envisioned Hobbes as a tool to help me to efficiently manage the library's web pages, specifically the growing number of subscription-based resources. In the months after Jed and I implemented Hobbes, we realized that it could be utilized to host tools that served the library's internal communication needs as well. Over the course of 2 years, we added tools as they were thought of and created, and placed them according to their function under tabs that are strung along the top of the Hobbes environment (see figure 1). Each librarian is given access to the tabs and tools she

needs based on her profile within Hobbes. Here I will describe each tab and some of the major tools (or tables) placed within them. With each description, I have included our label in parenthesis to help you compare what you are reading to the screenshots. To see how some of Hobbes resources are displayed to the public, please visit the HDL at <http://www.calvin.edu/library>.

Manager tab (Manager)

The Manager tab is used primarily by Jed and I to administer the contents within Hobbes. Since there are quite a few tools under the Manager tab (see figure 1) I'll briefly explain a number of these before moving on to the functions of the other tabs.

[figure 1]

figure 1 -- Screenshot showing Hobbes' Manager tab with the icon table displayed.

Databases (TofDBs)

Each research database record stored in a table of databases (TofDBs) contains the following fields that allow the resources to be displayed on the HDL in a variety of helpful ways:

- x **alphabetical**: based on the first letter; can also include see also references
- x **type**: citation index, abstracts, full text
- x **authentication**: whether the resource is accessed through IP authentication, for free on the web, CD-ROM, or a print index
- x **full text type**: describe a database's full text content, such as journal or newspaper articles, e-books, or even primary source historical documents
- x **vendor**: most useful for our librarians
- x **subject**: in our case, based on the college's academic disciplines
- x **peer-reviewed/refereed**: include a field where instructions can be included on how to limit a database search to peer-reviewed/refereed articles
- x **citation examples**: for full text databases, include a field that allows examples of citation styles for material found in the database. We created a web page on how to cite electronic resources, and this page displays a list of full text databases, which when

clicked brings the user to an information page that offers examples of how to cite the full text content

x **descriptors**: terms that describe the database and its contents, making it possible for patrons to search for appropriate databases. However, the search feature on the HDL has been turned off, since many patrons thought that by searching for a database, they were actually searching the contents of the database itself

Microforms (TofMic)

Web pages that describe our microform sets are stored as records in a table of microforms. In addition to a brief description of the microform set, each TofMic record includes detailed contents information. For some sets, this means a reel by reel description, or a detailed bibliography. For sets that have individual MARC records in our online catalog, we display a WebCat search box that limits searches to the appropriate microform set.

Reference (TofRef)

The college's academic departments each have a librarian assigned as a library liaison. One role of the liaison is to maintain a web page that highlights library resources that are important to the department, such as databases and microform sets, and important reference sets. By creating a database of reference sites, it will be possible for each liaison librarian to add web resources that she considers important for her departments.

Staff (Staff)

In addition to displaying staff information on the HDL, creating a table of staff allows each of the librarians to be authenticated into Hobbes. Like TofDBs records, the staff record contains many fields that allow the staff records to be used in a variety of ways:

- x login name (based on the college's LDAP server)
- x status: librarian, support staff, student assistant
- x office location, office hours, and phone number
- x responsibility: these show up in the HDL's A-Z Index, so that users can look for the cataloging librarian (for example)
- x birthday (so we all know when to expect birthday treats!)
- x access level: determines the Hobbes tabs (and tables within the tabs) that each staff member has access to. For example, the circulation manager only has access to the Lib Hours, Minutes, and Lib Resources tabs (see below)

A-Z Index of this web site (A-Z Index)

Entries that appear on the HDL's "A-Z Index of this web site" bring together records from several tables into one place, including the A-Z Index table, the TofDbs, TofMic, TofRef, and Staff table (figure 2).

[figure 2]

figure 2 -- the HDL's A-Z Index of this web site displays information pulled from several tables. A-Z Index records display icons from the Icon table.

Icons (icons)

As figure 2 shows, we made the A-Z Index more visually appealing after implementing a database of icons that is itself linked to from other Hobbes tables.

E-journals (Ejournal)

Based on the experience gained from implementing Hobbes, Jed and I decided to try our hand at managing our growing collection of e-journals. The Ejournal tool in Hobbes is designed to accept a collection in the form of batch loads of comma delimited files (created from lists from aggregated databases and our own e-journal lists). Using a complicated script, the tool creates e-journal records for each title based on ISSN; any

subsequent e-journals that are loaded as part of another collection are not added as unique records, but rather as a holding to the main e-journal record. Initially displayed to the public within a separate database called the E-journal Locator, we eventually figured out how to import these e-journal records into our online catalog, thereby offering our patrons one place to find all our journals, print or online.

Passwords (Passwords)

This table contains password records for resources that require login information to be entered, such as e-journals, database administrative modules, or database usage statistics. Creating one place for these allows the librarians to easily share this important information.

Quotations (Quotes)

The HDL homepage displays a unique quote each time the page is loaded, and each of these quotations is stored in the Quotes database. Additional tables control the “message of the day” (WebCat motd) that appears in the banner of our online catalog.

Reference desk tab (RefDesk)

The default Hobbes screen for the reference librarians is the RefDesk tab, which displays the tools librarians use while working at the reference desk. The top half of the screen displays any questions that have been submitted by a patron using the Ask a Librarian web form. The librarian can choose to immediately answer a question or

assign it to another librarian; statistics for all these questions are internally tabulated and can be accessed in Hobbes' Stats tab.

The bottom half of the RefDesk screen displays a RefBlog (a weblog) where librarians post reference related entries. RefBlog entries can also be tagged as a sample reference question to supply anecdotal evidence in statistical reports. All of the information within the RefDesk tab is searchable.

[figure 3]

figure 3 -- The RefDesk tab displays questions to the Ask a Librarian service as well as entries on the RefBlog.

Reference desk schedule tab (RefDesk Sched)

With constant shift changes being scribbled on the print copy of the reference desk schedule, or shifts being missed because they could not consult the schedule from home, the librarians welcomed the addition of an online reference desk schedule in Hobbes (figure 4). Four weeks worth of shifts are displayed at one time, and changes can be made simply by clicking on the librarian's name in a particular time slot.¹

[figure 4)

figure 4 -- The reference desk schedule displays four weeks at one time.

Library statistics tab (Stats)

Before Hobbes, librarians kept track of their own statistics in individual Microsoft Excel files, a program which many knew well enough in order to enter data, but not well enough to creatively display or manipulate the data. Various statistical tables are

included in the Stats tab, as well as a utility to create reports based on date and other criteria.

Library meeting minutes (Minutes)

The Minutes tab displays folders that contain minutes from the various groups of library staff that hold regular meetings. After being completed in Microsoft Word, the secretary logs into Hobbes and uploads the minutes into the appropriate folder for future reference. As well, an e-mail with the attached minutes is distributed to library staff who have this preference selected in their staff table record.

Library resources tab (Lib Resources)

While the librarians are able to share documents on a common drive on the campus network, it became apparent that some information could be better shared by being displayed within Hobbes. The Lib Resources tab contains a wide variety of links to resources such as a fund status report (used by liaison librarians to track departmental book budgets), employee policies, evaluation documents, and library labels, signs, and graphics.

Library hours tab (Lib Hours)

The hours of the Hekman Library are not easy to describe with text, so they are displayed on the HDL in a two-month calendar format. After being incorporated into Hobbes, the tedious process of updating this web page was replaced by a table that utilizes an existing calendar.

Library news tab (LibNews)

It didn't take me long after attending a session on RSS³ at the 2003 Computers in Libraries conference to wonder how we could incorporate this into Hobbes, and it took even less time for Jed to actually implement this feature. The LibNews tab displays information from RSS feeds, with the name of the feed on the left, and the contents of the feed displayed within a box on the right.

Database maintenance (DB Projects)

This tab contains links to the administrative modules of five locally created databases.² As with e-journals, records can be added, edited and deleted, and bulk amounts of data can be imported using delimited files.

Bookmarks (Bookmarks on bar beneath the tabs)

Since Hobbes displays information based on the librarian's login, we were able to add some tools that provided unique data for the librarian. For example, each librarian is able to upload into Hobbes their browser bookmarks from their office computer for use at the reference desk or from home. Librarians are also able to upload liaison newsletters into Hobbes, which in turn are displayed on the their HDL staff page.

Future of Hobbes

Jed and I created Hobbes on the fly, with no blueprint for what the "product" would eventually become. Consequently, we gave many of the resources names and locations

that make sense to us now (what exactly is a “Tofdbb_cit_label?”), but would potentially be quite confusing for the librarians who use the system, or for our successors were we to leave Calvin. With this in mind, most Hobbes tools have a text box for instructions that can uniquely identify the resource, and include information on why the tool was created and what HDL pages contain its dynamic data (see figure 1). In the near future I plan to flesh out these instructions as we consider plans to make Hobbes control the remaining HDL pages. From time to time we find other ways of displaying the data, and as other tools are added, we rename, recreate, and reorganize some of the tabs.

Even though Hobbes is yet another resource vying for the attentions of already scheduled, it was not difficult to convince the librarians that Hobbes was something they should be using. They like that library information has been moved from files on a shared network directory to an environment where it can be stored, displayed, and manipulated for the benefit of both library staff and the patrons we serve.

The biggest challenge that we face is the maintenance required to keep Hobbes' information up-to-date as well as keeping the complex scripts working properly. Creating a CMS like Hobbes required extensive programming skills. Despite the Hekman Library's relatively small size, I was fortunate that the library also employed a systems programmer. Other libraries considering a system like Hobbes would not only have to evaluate the skills of available employees, but also consider the time needed to create and maintain such a system.

Biography

Greg Sennema is Digital Resources and Reference/Instruction Librarian at Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan. He holds a Masters of Information Studies from the University of Toronto. His email address is gsennema@calvin.edu

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