Solutions for Subject Guides

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The following article describes two libraries' experiences with the implementation of new software packages to deliver timely, accurate and dynamic content via library subject guides. Acadia University in Wolfville, Nova Scotia implemented new subject guides using LibGuides in 2007 and Holland College in Charlottetown, PEI recently launched their new guides in the fall of 2008 using SubjectsPlus.

Acadia University's Experience

In early 2007, librarians at Acadia University decided it was time to start implementing web 2.0 technologies (IM chat, facebook apps, blogs, wikis etc.) into our library's virtual presence. Rather than expecting students to come to us, the librarians would attempt to become a presence in the students' online world using technology familiar to them. Librarians were seeking the ability to update their web presence anytime, anywhere and to quickly respond to the needs of the Acadia community. However with varying degrees of web design and html coding abilities, librarians were unsure of how to get more timely control over our web content. Our answer was LibGuides.

That's why we did it, now here's how we did. Five librarians and one archivist created twenty seven guides in two weeks with assistance from the library's web technician. The key to a successful implementation of Libguides was the creation of a standard template. This not only allowed our guides to be of a high quality with fairly consistent content, it also permitted quick implementation. One librarian took responsibility for creating the template in consultation with all members of the department. During a group meeting, librarians determined what content should appear in every guide. The template was created with everything and then librarians could go in and delete items not relevant to their subject areas. Another key to Acadia's high usage, was the promotion and placement of the guides. The library website was designed to funnel students directly to the subject guides. Libraries that highlight or link directly to subject guides from their main page get many more hits on their guides than those that are difficult to find or accessed through libguides.com.

The Product

SpringShare provides the following description of their product: "LibGuides is a fully featured, easy to use, web 2.0 content management and publishing system. It combines the best features of blogs, wikis, and social networks into one package designed

specifically for libraries." Features described on the site include: "Post to LibGuides" Browser Button and LibX Integration, LibGuides Email Alerts, Templates, Collaboration, Reuse of Content, Tagging and Categorizing by Subjects, Integration with Del.icio.us and Social Bookmarking, Integration with Twitter, RSS Feeds, Podcasts, Videos on Your Guides, Polls, Resource Ratings, Comments, User Submissions, Full Usage Statistics, Link Checker Functionality Built-in, Librarian Profiles & Reference Chat Integration, Facebook® Apps + LibGuides Widgets, Customized Look & Feel, and LibGuides Community. And according to the statistics, librarians seem to be taking advantage of this product (Table 1).

Table 1: Libguides Usage Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>No. of Institutions</th>
<th>No. of Editors/Librarians</th>
<th>No. of Guides</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 31, 2008</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>2650</td>
<td>5840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 6, 2008</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>3121</td>
<td>6749</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 22, 2008</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>7093</td>
<td>21149</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The increasing popularity of this product is likely due to its ease of use and functionality. The product has been designed specifically for librarians and library content. Figure 1 illustrates the types of content that can be quickly created. The most commonly used boxes are the Rich Text/Dynamic Content boxes which contain a simple html editor to allow you to create whatever you want. RSS feeds allow you to publish your new book lists from your catalogue or link to other feeds from scholarly journals or news sources. Links and Lists is a useful box for listing article databases and electronic collections. Embedded video is often used to link to youtube videos from other libraries or to host locally created video tutorials. Interactive polls and user feedback boxes allow patrons to interact with you and your content. Books from the Catalog allows you to highlight titles using cover art.

In addition to having more control over the content presented on your library's website, using Libguides allows content to be presented into courseware systems using the widgets feature.

![Figure 1: Types of content boxes](image1)

The Result

A happier workplace. Use of the subject guides has increased dramatically and librarians are pleased with the control and autonomy they have over their web content and the ability to communicate with our community. In addition, the use of other new technology such as the open source "Jing Project" by TechSmith, allows librarians to

![Figure 2: Widget Embedded in Moodle](image2)
create on the fly step-by-step tutorials that can be embedded into our Libguides when a need arises. This allows more teachable moments outside the classroom.

Please visit Acadia University Libguides at: http://libguides.acadiau.ca, or for more information about the product visit: http://www.libguides.com.

**Holland College's Experience**

Like Acadia and many libraries, Holland College wanted a better method for managing their online content, especially as it related to their subject guides. We had examined and tested a number of different open source options including: wikis, delicious, generic Yahoo-like applications, and subject guide specific tools like CWIS (Collection Workflow Integration System) from the Internet Scout Project. None of the applications tested seemed to suit the College's needs.

In March 2008, an article that reviewed open source, database driven subject guides provided the incentive to once again explore the options suggested (Corrado & Frederick, 2008). **SubjectsPlus**, developed by Ithaca College Library's Andrew Darby (2008), seemed to offer the functionality and ease of use we sought. To use SubjectsPlus you will need a webserver (Apache), a database application (MySQL), and PHP (a web scripting language). The heart of the application is a subject content...
management tool that gives authorized users the ability to add individual records and attach them to any number of subjects [Figure 4].

Figure 4: SubjectPlus - Control Panel - Records Interface
The subjects themselves are associated with a particular library staff member, so that when a guide is generated the associated staff member's contact information appears as well [Figure 5]. Records are further detailed by applying source types, locations, formats, and content types. Subject guide content can be enhanced using the application's Sidebar feature to add recommended resources, RSS feeds, links to related materials in the library catalogue, links to specific journal titles or collections, and help guide documents. The free text feature allows users to embed widgets such as Meebo, YouTube videos, subject specific search boxes, and similar types of tools. All of the underlying scripts, style sheets, and the database itself can be edited and customized to suit your needs. For example we styled our version of SubjectsPlus to match the College's new website design and we modified the database structure so that we could include an editable version of our hours.

Figure 5: SubjectPlus - Generated Subject Guide
The Plus part of SubjectsPlus

SubjectsPlus does more than manage our subject guide content - it manages much of our online content. We utilize an A-to-Z list feature of the Records module to automatically populate the library's A-to-Z list of databases and electronic resources [Figure 6].

![SubjectPlus - Database A to Z list](image)

Figure 6: SubjectPlus - Database A to Z list

The Departments module of the application allows us to maintain contact and hours information for our branches and with the Administrative module we are able to maintain staff contact and library liaison information. We use the FAQ module to provide students and staff with information on a variety of topics including citing and plagiarism, services, "how do I" type questions, and so on [Figure 7].
Like many open source projects, SubjectsPlus has a community of users and developers who are actively improving and extending the application. To date, the SubjectsPlus wiki (2008) reports that 15 libraries are using the application in a production environment. The SubjectsPlus wiki is a useful starting point for those wishing to find out more about the application and for those who adopt it, there is a responsive SubjectsPlus Google Group that deals with bugs, improvements, and questions about the application (2008).

SubjectsPlus meets our needs at Holland College and it is a cost effective solution. It allows library staff in our distributed branches to add and maintain their own subject guide content and more. If you want to get started, download SubjectsPlus from http://ithacalibrary.com/subsplus/download.php.
Work Cited


