

The Use of Drupal in Libraries

Until a few years ago, creating a fully-functional website required the knowledge of computer programming skills. It was always the responsibility of a web designer to create the code needed to build a site, especially if a dynamic aspect was needed to allow for the interaction of the site's visitors. As web developers began sharing their code, applications were built and their source code was shared to the public. Drupal is one example of open-source software created by a community of developers which is freely available for anyone to download and customize depending on their needs.

According to Drupal's website, it "is a free software package that allows you to easily organize, manage and publish your content, with an endless variety of customization." ("About Drupal") It is a powerful web application which lets the user focus on the layout and content of their site with no coding experience necessary. But more importantly, it is a Content Management System (CMS), which allows for more than one individual to publish and manage the site's content completely separate from the presentation of the content. Each user can be given specific permissions to post, edit or delete content at the administrator's discretion, while not affecting the site's structure. Content creation by certain users can also be moderated and will not be published until the administrator has granted their approval.

Drupal's web interface allows the user to manipulate content, but only to a certain extent. Since it only contains basic files with core modules and themes included with the initial installation, additional functions are needed to extend the capabilities of your

website. When Drupal is initially installed, there are a few modules (plugins) already included, but over 9,000 more can be found at <http://drupal.org/project/modules>. By installing certain modules developed by members of the Drupal community, users can create additional functionality to their site. The modules can be searched according to category and filtered by compatibility depending on which version of Drupal you have installed on your server.

Another way to customize the appearance of your Drupal website is by changing its theme, which “allows you to change the look and feel of your site.” (“Themes”) Just as some modules are already uploaded after installation, the same case applies for themes. Additional themes can be downloaded at <http://drupal.org/project/themes>, where there are currently over 900 choices. Themes are developed with HTML, CSS and PHP coding and can be customized to suit your needs with the support of an active Drupal community of over 630,000 users and developers. In addition, Drupal camps and conferences are held throughout the year which offers training and help for the further development of your Drupal website. Additional help can be found on an established listserv located at <http://drupal4lib.org>, where users can look for answers to their questions by searching through the archive and by subscribing to the listserv to post their queries for further help.

Since it is a web-based application and is easy to implement, Drupal is an excellent choice to develop a website for a library. Although it requires the knowledge of web servers and the installation of Apache, MySql and PHPMyadmin, Drupal is a very powerful software and should be a library’s first choice. After the software is installed, the set up of the site is fairly simple. You are directed to select an installation profile,

asked to choose a language, verify the requirements, set up the database, install a profile and configure the site. There are navigation links located along the top of the site, which can be used to make changes to the content, structure, appearance, modules, configuration and more. Several users can be created and given certain permissions, which allows for the management of the library's website to be distributed amongst the staff members, while keeping track of which staff members have been actively modifying and adding information to the site. Since the presentation of the content (ie. color, fonts, etc.) is completely separate from the actual content, the presentation of the site will not be affected.

Keeping the website updated with current information is very important. With Drupal, the burden of keeping the website updated is no longer dependent on one person. Since the software is web-based, any of these changes can be made anytime from virtually anywhere. In addition, each department can choose their own theme for their site and add content that is relevant to their patrons, keeping their attention and engaging them in what the library has to offer. With the help of custom modules, it is possible to only show items to certain patrons, depending on their borrowing privileges. Patrons can also customize the site to their own specifications, which lends itself to an increased interest in usage.

Drupal can also be used to create a staff intranet, which allows information to be securely shared within an organization. Staff members can collaborate and share information between departments with the use of an intranet, which increases efficiency. It can also reduce the amount of time an employee spends searching for certain policies, procedures, documents, etc., since all of these can be converted to an electronic format

and placed online. In addition, this fosters a green environment since there is a reduction in the user of paper correspondence. As a result, using Drupal to create an intranet is extremely cost-effective.

Unfortunately there are some limitations when using an open-source like Drupal. There must be a member on staff who must possess the skills required in order to both customize and maintain the system. Since they are assigned to perform duties such as upgrading the hardware and software from time to time, their presence is important. If they decide to leave the organization, an immediate replacement is necessary. Because the software is not purchased from a vendor, support can only be given by this staff member. Members of the Drupal community can be contacted for help, but it could possibly take more time than the library staff is willing to wait.

Many libraries have decided that the advantages certainly outweigh the disadvantages. According to <http://groups.drupal.org/libraries/libraries>, there are scores of libraries using Drupal including public, school, university and special libraries, library services and library consortia. The names of the libraries and direct links to their Drupal websites can be found by visiting the above hyperlink. Drupal is also a topic being discussed at the American Library Association's (ALA) Midwinter Meeting in Dallas, Texas. This week, the Library Information Technology Association (LITA) is sponsoring a conference called "Getting Started with Drupal" and two sessions called "Drupal 101". In Denver, Colorado, a five day Drupalcon is scheduled this March and the conference will focus on "'Collaborative Publishing for Every Device' [which] is a study on the shift of web access from traditional desktops to mobile devices, phones or tablets, and with it the greater combination of platforms Drupal leverages and integrates."

(“About | DrupalCon Denver”) Over 100 sessions are scheduled, including one called, “Create Your Community: Social Archiving and Participatory Culture.” “Members of the community have unique stories and materials to share that are often overlooked when an institution digitizes only their collections. This session about Social Archives will include anyone with an interest in helping to collect and preserve history, and put users and community groups in control of the content.” (“Create Your Community: Social Archiving and Participatory Culture”) Another session called, ‘CRM Core for Non-Profits and Education’ will “discuss using CRM Core to solve common challenges faced by non-profit and academic institutions, using case studies from several high profile foundations and institutions to demonstrate the use of the modules.” (“CRM Core for Non-profits and Education”)

There are quite a few modules that have been created just for libraries. The Bibliography module “allows you to manage and display lists of scholarly publications”. (“Bibliography Module”) A working example of this module can be found at <http://liiscience.org>. Another is called MARC, which allows you to “import MARC records as nodes, to do things like pre-populating book review sites or even recreating your library’s catalog in a rich social environment.” (“MARC”) A demonstration of this module is located at <http://www.fivesystems.org>. Another important module for libraries is the Z39.50/SRU Client module, which “implements the Z39.50 and SRU protocols for Information Retrieval.” (“Z39.50/SRU Client”) The Millennium OPAC Integration module is another which “integrates Drupal with III/Millennium WebOPAC’s (library catalogs) where you can import bibliographic records,” (“Millennium OPAC Integration”) as seen here at <http://drupalmtty.com/millennium>.

Since these modules are created for libraries, they add functionality to a Drupal site and facilitate the use of their site by their patrons. Creating a site which is easy to navigate and updated with fresh and engaging content will foster patron interaction and increase visits to the library, both online and in-person. Allowing patrons to comment on the library blog, tag entries in the OPAC, participate in a library forum and using other social media tools is critical in maintaining the importance of the library in the community where it resides.

By using Drupal, libraries can also increase participation in their programs and keep their patrons informed about what's happening at their library. With Drupal's SignUp module, patrons can "sign up (or register, as in register for a class)...[which] includes options for sending notification email to a selected email address upon a new user sign up and...a confirmation email to users who sign up." ("Signup") Promoting these events and keeping track of their interest is important. By using these tools, today's libraries are embracing new technology which will enable their patrons to obtain and use information in exciting new ways.

Libraries would be foolish to not take advantage of Drupal to build their website. Doing so would facilitate the patron's search for current information in a visually appealing online environment while engaging them in the library's ongoing programs and events. This can be accomplished when using Drupal to create a library website. Properly using these technologies to their fullest potential will enhance service and strengthen their value in the community and would strengthen the library's mission to provide educational, informational, cultural and recreational enrichment to all its members.

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