

A Broader menu beckons in the LMS Market.

By Ken Chad.

(This article was originally published in CILIP Library+Information Gazette on 24th April 2009)

In the light of the UK Conference on open source software for libraries,¹ Ken Chad reports on the growing interest which contrasts sharply with the situation only two years ago

Surveying Higher Education (HE) in 2007, the JISC and SCONUL commissioned study on the Library Management Systems (LMS) Market² revealed no appetite to move to Open Source LMSs. 'No respondents thought that it was likely that they would adopt an Open Source LMS'. Public libraries took a similar stance. A debate in August 2007 on the public library discussion list, LIS-PUB-LIBS uncovered, no enthusiasm for an open source LMS. One respondent commented, 'Open Source' is "not yet" for libraries - we need a watching brief'.³ Indeed the JISC/SCONUL LMS study came to a similar conclusion and in the section of the report entitled 'Making Decisions' it recommended that libraries '....keep a watch on Open Source development'

Two years on and attitudes *are* changing. Earlier this month Karl Drinkwater, E-learning Adviser for the JISC Regional Support Centre Wales summarised (on the LIS-LINK listserve) some of the results of his investigations into open source. 'It seems that a lot of institutions are considering the open source LMS route - most of those that responded were at this consideration stage, rather than implementation'. One of his correspondents reported dismay at the fact they *hadn't* gone the open source route: 'In my opinion, the time spent on a Koha / Evergreen solution would have been a very productive period resulting in a very impressive system-independent solution: instead of which we've ended up with a less powerful and more restrictive system [commercial LMS] that runs on only a single platform at the whim of a single commercial company.'

'It seems that a lot of institutions are considering the open source LMS route - most of those that responded were at this consideration stage, rather than implementation'

In the US there has been much greater overt frustration with the 'conventional' (closed source) LMS providers. In the US there has been much greater overt frustration with the 'conventional' (closed source) LMS providers. When Duke University made its listserve postings in January 2008 announcing they were '....preparing a proposal for the Mellon Foundation to convene the academic library community to design an open source Integrated Library System (ILS)', they made the following declaration: 'We feel that software companies have not designed Integrated Library Systems that meet the needs of academic libraries, and we don't think those companies are likely to meet libraries' needs in the future'. Duke University got their money and the Open Library Environment ('OLE') project is proceeding.⁴

In the US there has been much greater overt frustration with the 'conventional' (closed source) LMS providers.

¹ For more details and the programme go to

http://www.openlibraries.eu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2&Itemid=3

² JISC & SCONUL Library Management Systems Study. An Evaluation and horizon scan of the current library management systems and related systems landscape for UK higher education. By Sero Consulting Ltd with Glenaffric Ltd and Ken Chad Consulting Ltd. March 2008. <http://www.kenchadconsulting.co.uk/images/stories/lmsstudy.pdf>

³ The comments are available on the LIS-PUB LIBS archive which is available on the JISCmail web site <http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/>

⁴ See <http://oleproject.org/> 'With support from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, a multinational group of libraries is developing the design for an Open Library Environment (OLE), an alternative to the current model of an Integrated Library

In his 2008 introduction to *Open Source Library Automation* ⁵, Industry commentator Marshall Breeding comments wrote: 'This is a time of major transition in the library automation industry and the open source software movement has found fertile ground among libraries'. Indeed since 2006 Breeding has considered that open source products represented a sufficiently large portion of the market to warrant coverage in his annual Marketplace Review published each April in *Library Journal* ⁶. His 2009 assessment is that, 'Open Source systems such as Koha and Evergreen have entered the marketplace as **routine** options.' One of the key barriers to the adoption of Open source has been the perceived need for generous helpings of in-house technical development and support expertise. Few UK public or HE libraries have that capability. In the US, commercial companies such as LibLime and Equinox have helped overcome that barrier and increasing numbers of libraries are getting free open source LMS software and paying commercial companies for support and sometimes development. Things are changing in the UK too. Karl Drinkwater reported. 'The two companies supporting Koha in the UK seem to be MJ Ray's TTLTP and the new European division of PTFS'. In January PTFS announced a contract with The European Southern Observatory (ESO). The observatory library is replacing their SirsiDynix Unicorn system with Koha. Other migrations from commercial LMSs appear to be in the pipeline.

'open source systems such as Koha and Evergreen have entered the marketplace as routine options.'

In the US a significant driver in the development of Open Source LMSs has been library consortia. The Evergreen system began in just this way as a project for a consortium of public libraries in Georgia. Consortia offer fertile ground for open source because, working together, they can bring significant money to the development table. Consortia are a lot less common in the UK with HE lagging behind public libraries. Therefore the recent announcement by SCONUL that it had been successful in obtaining funding from HE Funding Council to undertake a shared services feasibility study into the LMS and related systems landscape is very significant. One of the key questions it will address is 'What, if any, opportunities exist to develop a shared service response for a next generation open source LMS landscape for UK higher education libraries'⁷

In the US a significant driver in the development of Open Source LMSs has been library consortia. The Evergreen system began in just this way as a project for a consortium of public libraries in Georgia.

Change won't happen overnight but the open source LMS now seem likely to be a growing part of the UK library landscape. The barriers are being broken....

Ken Chad is CEO of Ken Chad Consulting Ltd

Email: ken@kenchadconsulting.com

Tel: +44 (0)7788 727 845

www.kenchadconsulting.com

System. The goal is to produce a design document to inform open source library system development efforts, to guide future library system implementations, and to influence current Integrated Library System vendor products'

⁵ Open Source Integrated Library Systems'. By Marshal Breeding. Library Technology Reports. November/December 2008. Vol 44/no. 8

⁶ 'Investing in The Future: Automation Marketplace 2009. Pressing onward in an uncertain economy'. By Marshall Breeding. Library Journal, 1st April 2009. <http://www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA6645868.html>

⁷ See the SCONUL website. http://www.sconul.ac.uk/news/lms_apr09