

## **Drupal and Libraries** by Ellyssa Kroski

Published in *The CyberSkeptic's Guide to Internet Research*, September 2008

Today's hottest Web destinations are sites which incorporate social features and functionality. They draw in readers by giving them the option to become writers as well; to contribute, to interact, to share, and to create. I use just that type of website to engage library school students in their study of new and emerging technologies. For each class I design a private social network in which students have their own blogs, may upload photos and embed videos, tag and bookmark content, create detailed user profiles, add friends to buddy lists, converse in a live chat room, and sign up for events on the course calendar. I do this through a free, open-source, content management system called Drupal which enables the development of social websites.

### **How It Works**

Developed in 2001 by Belgian Dries Buytaert, Drupal software is modular in structure with a “core” program that allows website owners to edit, organize, and publish content to the Web through a user interface. Website designers can create a robust website with user blogs and profiles, RSS feeds, member forums, and taxonomies “right out of the box” by activating its pre-installed modules. Additional modules contributed by the developer community are easily downloadable and may be installed to add features. Community-created themes can also be downloaded to enhance website layouts and color schemes. And Drupal provides user-friendly administrative menus for managing every aspect of your website community. Drupal runs on a foundation of Apache, MySQL, and PHP, all of which are also open technologies, and can be used in a Windows, Linux, or Mac environment.

### **Library Drupallers**

Libraries have joined the tens of thousands of individuals and organizations who are using Drupal to build participatory websites which encourage a sense of community among their visitors. With it they are developing dynamic and engaging library websites, communities of interest, collaborative team environments, staff intranets, and more.

The most recognized library Drupal installation is the Ann Arbor District library website which saw a 40% increase in traffic during its first year. Their librarian blogs have received over 13,400 comments from their 45,000 active members which have registered on the site. They developed a custom module that reformats the data from their OPAC to produce an integrated library catalog within their website with patron tagging.

The University of Minnesota Libraries have developed EthicShare, a social networking website for scholars focused around the issue of ethics which attempts to address the needs of scholars doing work in this interdisciplinary field by creating a community which heavily uses bibliographic data.

The Simon Fraser University Learning Commons is using Drupal to offer a workshop sign-up service on their website. They needed a tool to enable students to pre-register for high-demand workshops given by the library and Drupal fit the bill. Students are able to sign-up, receive event reminders and cancel registrations while staff can view and delete students and send out mailings, limit registrants and more.

The Red Deer Public Library has not only designed their library website with Drupal, but has employed it to build an intranet where staff blog, plan projects, and develop and test out new functionality such as tag clouds and forums for their public website in a “just testing” area.

### **Where to Start**

At first glance, designing one of these websites may seem a daunting task. However, a simple website

or even a social networking community such as my course websites with additional modules and functionality can be created without any programming knowledge and without ever touching a bit of code. Developers of more complex websites with custom functionality and theming will need to get their hands dirty, however, but don't despair - there is plenty of help out there. One of the great things about Drupal is its active and engaged user community which can be seen in action on the drupal.org website where developers have contributed more than 1,900 modules, 42,000 members participate in groups, and still others are present to offer advice and snippets of code.

To get started, librarians will want to check out the Drupal and Libraries Listserv, visit the Drupal and Libraries Group and the Drupalib Library Drupallers Community. While on the official drupal.org website, don't miss the library-related modules which are available for download including the Bibliography, Marc Record, Book Review, Millenium, and Z39.50 modules. Those looking to get up to speed using the technology will find plenty of tutorials and podcasts between the the Lullabot and Drupal DoJo websites. For even more resources, and to discover how other libraries are using Drupal, check out my slidecast (PowerPoint + audio track) titled Drupal and Libraries on Slideshare.net.

## **Links**

Ann Arbor District Library Website

<http://www.aadl.org>

University of Minnesota Libraries' EthicShare

<http://ethicshare.cs.umn.edu>

Simon Fraser University Learning Commons

<http://workshops.learningcommons.sfu.ca>

Red Deer Public Library

<http://www.rdpl.org>

Drupal Website

<http://drupal.org>

Drupal and Libraries Listserv

<http://listserv.uic.edu/archives/drupal4lib.html>

Drupal and Libraries Group

<http://groups.drupal.org/libraries>

Drupalib Library Drupallers Community

<http://drupalib.interoperating.info>

Lullabot

<http://www.lullabot.com/podcast>

Drupal DoJo

<http://drupaldojo.com>

Drupal and Libraries Slidecast <http://www.slideshare.net/ellyssa/drupal-and-libraries>