LibGuides. Content management tool. Springshre, LLC., P.O. Box 861, New York, NY 10108; <http://www.springshare.com/libguides/>. Price: $899.00-$2,999.00 for annual license.

Over the past few years, librarians of all stripes have been talking about or exploring social networking and Web 2.0 tools in various ways. There is no shortage of bleeding edge technology or people looking for the next “killer app” for organizing online information. For many librarians and information professionals trying to grasp and master some of the new tools is overwhelming. The thought of learning a new application or tool to manage an already unwieldy amount of information can be depressing to some. Fortunately, there is a user-friendly tool and its name is LibGuides.

General Description

Developed by individuals at Springshare, LLC who worked at and with libraries and understand the library environment, LibGuides is a content management tool allowing librarians to organize and present library collections to users in a customizable fashion using Web 2.0 applications. As described on the LibGuides product home page, “[LibGuides] combines the best features of blogs, wikis, and social networks into one package designed specifically for libraries.” The majority of LibGuides are hosted by the libraries themselves (e.g., [www.libguide.institution.edu](http://www.libguide.institution.edu)) allowing the library to customize the look and feel of the guide with the home institution’s brand. The guides can also be linked to over 30 social applications including Facebook, Delicious, and Digg, to name a few. The dynamic quality of the collections created in LibGuides is what makes this tool an easy way to explore social applications in a secure manner while providing patrons with access to the library’s resources. The hosting institution has its own secure portals and firewalls and any LibGuides created under those conditions is protected.

Major Features

All LibGuides have the same structure—a home page and as many subject pages as desired. The content boxes have the same look and feel as well. While the color scheme may vary from one institution to another, users quickly become familiar with how LibGuides look and how to navigate within them. This consistency reduces the learning curve and helps the patron become a power user more quickly. The administration of LibGuides is quick as well. A LibGuides administrator creates new user accounts for librarians, updates the guides if a library resource becomes available or is disabled, and creates multi-editor accounts for up to four librarians to edit a single guide. This function is useful if a guide is designed to serve a multidisciplinary group or department. Librarians can create a profile box that can appear on every guide the librarian designs. The profile contains standard contact information, instant messaging widgets, and even a photo or image. This profile box personalizes the LibGuides and helps bridge the gap between patron and librarian. A link for user comments is available on every LibGuides page for users to submit comments about the guides overall or a particular guide page or resource box on a page. This dynamic exchange between user and librarian is one of the hallmarks of LibGuides.

Creating a Guide

To create a LibGuides content page you are presented with a template containing a standard “home” tab that applies to all LibGuides. You can add as few or as many content boxes to this first page as you like. As you design the content box a pull-down menu displays a list of different content types. Options include simple links and lists, podcast or RSS feeds, links to your library catalog, and interactive polls, etc. Simply give the content box a title and select the type of content to be made available. One of the best things about LibGuides is that librarians do not need expertise with codes or programming Web 2.0 tools. LibGuides has done the work behind the scenes. Here’s an example: say you want a content box that links to the journals in the cardiology section of your library’s catalog. First create a rich text content box called “Cardiology.” Next, in the rich text editor screen, type “Cardiology Journals,” highlight the text with your cursor, select the hyperlink icon in the text editor toolbar, paste the URL from your library catalog location for the cardiology journals and save the link. You can choose to have the link open in the current or a new window. With a few simple mouse clicks you have created a “one-stop shopping” locale for your patrons looking for cardiology journals at your library.

Additional Features

LibGuides keeps Usage Statistics for each guide a librarian creates, which is an invaluable way to monitor guide traffic. This is real-time data displaying how many hits for a particular guide, the individual pages for that guide, and even the links that are embedded on those pages. A librarian can see at an instant if a resource on the guide is or isn’t being utilized. There is a feature “Post to LibGuides” which is useful when the librarian discovers a new resource while browsing the Web. A medical librarian might follow a link from a cardiology journal to a website that describes a new procedure or study, and while at the website click “Post to LibGuides” option in the toolbar. A screen will appear asking which LibGuides, page, and content box should receive the link.

Customization and Utilization

LibGuides allows a librarian to create a resource of relevant resources targeted to as broad or narrow a patron-base as required. To really understand the power and versatility of this tool one should visit the LibGuides Community site (<http://community.libguides.com/>) and search by topic, guide author or institution. The diversity of utilization of this resource is impressive. History librarians have guides devoted to specific eras or geographic locations; health librarians have guides for medical specialities, conditions, or disciplines. The potential is limited only by the librarian’s imagination. Because LibGuides incorporates Web 2.0 applications into its structure, the content can be continually updated. For instance, in the Cardiology Journal example above, by linking directly to your library’s catalog, new materials will be listed once they appear in the collection. Creating a content box to list RSS feeds and podcasts for topics will provide patrons with current news, discussions or lectures. Using the Post to LibGuides option, the librarian can create a dynamic link “on the fly” to this resource for the cardiology guide, including what page and which content box the link should appear. The librarians at the Health Science Center Libraries at the University of Florida, where the author of this review is employed, have so far created eighteen LibGuides for the different areas of the health sciences including nursing, public health, consumer health, pharmacy, and dentistry. We also created a set of Orientation LibGuides to assist new faculty and medical residents become familiar with the library’s resources and materials.

Librarians who have been hesitant to experiment with Web 2.0 tools because they could not see any benefit for their patrons will be pleasantly surprised with this content management tool. LibGuides are easy to learn and create. They are a fresh way for librarians to work with students, researchers, clinicians and faculty. Monitoring the Usage Statistics utility lets librarians see immediately if a guide is being visited, down to which page of the guide or links on the page. Instant messaging widgets can be embedded in the guide for users to ask questions and librarians to respond in real time. The team at Springshare have done their homework and given libraries a fun and exciting tool to play with.

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