LMS ‘approaching end of life cycle’ says expert

Tim Buckley Owen reports on a radical view of the future from library automation specialist Marshall Breeding.

PEOPLE ARE ‘LESS than happy’ with the current choice of integrated library systems (ILSs), which consists of mature products that are approaching the end of their life cycle, suggests Marshall Breeding, Director for Innovative Technology & library management technology company Talis’s Insight Conference in Nashville, Tennessee.

Developers don’t seem to be having much luck with new ones – and the old ones don’t age as well as wine.

Breaching out of the current mould was the theme of Marshall Breeding’s presentation, to a packed audience, at information & library management technology company Talis’s Insight Conference in Birmingham earlier this month. Existing monolithic systems are less and less in tune with user expectations or the way 21st-century libraries work, he believes, and big changes are on the horizon.

Consolidation among providers has resulted in an uncomfortable narrowing of options that are available to libraries. There’s dissatisfaction with the commercial offerings and with closed source systems – and it’s throwing up opportunities for the open source community.

Too little innovation

It’s all come about because there’s too little innovation at present. ‘How many of you believe that your library automation system gives you everything you need?’ he challenged. ‘Is it cooler than your iPod?’

However, it’s pretty tough to ditch your existing system unless you’re forced to – and forced migration is relatively rare. You get a bad fundholder reaction if you want to buy a new system, he acknowledges.

There are better things to spend your money on – new interfaces for library users, federated search.

The world is less ILS-centric now, he suggests, and there are plenty of companies that are in library automation but not involved in ILSs at all. Open source alternatives to commercial systems are becoming more of a practical option.

However, open source is not cheaper, he warns. What you may save on acquisition costs you spend on more local support. The open source market share is minuscule at the moment, he acknowledged. But it will grow over the next three to five years, and be a catalyst for further developments, not least because it will present formidable competition for the commercial providers.

There will be no real ‘traction’ until open software has a real impact on the commercial systems, he suggested. But, when it does, what should emerge should not be more complex, but simply more robust and functional.

‘Take inter-library loans; they’re not well automated at present. Existing systems simply don’t reflect the way libraries operate today.

However, we don’t want to create a new monolith, what we need is a suite of interoperable modules. A more lightweight approach is required, because existing systems are in danger of collapsing under their own weight.

Current systems are too compartmentalised. Why, for example, handle physical and digital materials separately? Why focus on the online public access catalogue (Opac)? It doesn’t cover online articles; it’s only a small part of the system.

‘Do we even need our own Opac?’

‘We’re actually moving into a post-metadata world. Library resource discovery is done through the actual searching of the digital object homes. Users are ‘underwhelmed’ by what they find on library websites, compared with search engines to get into our own collections.

With such a model, he challenges, do we even need our own Opac?

We need more service-oriented architecture, more applications for the libraries of the future.

Exploit global interfaces

This means more interoperability, including meshing in with global resources such as Google Scholar. We must exploit global interfaces to drive users towards library resources, he continues – using the search engines to get into our own collections.

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DEEP IMPRESSION: The Geological Society’s library has had a major upgrade, blending old and new. Focus on furniture and design, pages 7-11

Winning ways with RFID: Award Page 3

Can you afford to ignore good design? Page 7

NEWS BRIEFS

Major Scottish deal for Ex Libris

NHS Education for Scotland (NES) has purchased the Aleph library management system from Ex Libris to meet the needs of 42 library services across Scotland.

The deal concludes two years of preparatory work and tender evaluations. The implementation process includes eight regional Health Boards and six national services, plus two non-NHS partner services.

Andrew Jackson, Senior Information Manager, NES, says: ‘We are looking forward to realising the benefits of unifying the automated library services of NHS Scotland and our partners in the voluntary and education sectors.

This is a major step forward in developing the Scottish Health Information Environment, and will have tangible benefits for patient care and health improvement.’

Sunday paper slot for CILIP

CILIP has a double page of editorial appearing in the Independent on Sunday on 2 December. Remember to buy a copy or pick up a free paper from the CILIP stand at the Online Information exhibition.

The editorial aims to engage with the public, to raise brand awareness of CILIP, and demonstrate the range of sectors in which information professionals work and the importance of the work they do.

We will celebrate the success of members who have gained a CILIP qualification this year by listing their names. You can read the articles and add your comments from 2 December at www.cilip.org.uk/independent