Looking Back, Moving Forward:
open repositories at the crossroads

10th Open Repositories Conference, 8-11 June 2015, Indianapolis

Repositories play a vital role in the information landscape and are being developed and used across libraries, publishers, research institutes and commercial organisations. Open Repositories (OR) is a conference for delegates from all of the above sectors. This year's conference took place in Indianapolis and I was lucky enough be able to attend after winning one of two bursaries awarded by the Academic and Special Libraries group of the Library Association of Ireland.

OR brings together those involved in creating and using repositories on all levels; from software developers, front end designers, and academics to librarians of all sorts including repository managers, metadata creators, cataloguers, and research data custodians. It is a four day conference with the first day based on workshops. This is followed by two days of talks and papers, some focused on specific technology but mainly of a more general interest followed by a final fourth day devoted to Fedora, Dspace and Eprints user groups.

I attended the Fedora workshop which introduced Fedora 4. One really useful aspect of the workshop was that the organisers had distributed a virtual machine which simplified the installation process and meant workshop participants were up and running in minutes.

Kaitlin Thaney (Mozilla Science Lab) gave the keynote talk on open science and open access. Specifically she spoke about the need for open science and how Mozilla aim to leverage the power of the 'open web' to develop greater research capabilities and support the future of scientific discovery.

Anurag Acharya (Google Scholar) gave a packed conference address on "Indexing Repositories: Pitfalls & Best Practices" – with best practice being synonymous with "How to optimise your repository for Google Scholar". His presentation is

available at: http://bit.ly/1FIp2Gt

Despite really enjoying the conference I found four days to be tough going. The conference content is mixed, some sessions are quite technical, others might introduce new technologies, or developments in local services. The general sessions included topics such as developing staff or the demands in moving from project launch to a sustained service. The style of presentation differed depending on the session but overall it is relaxed, and based more on workplace experience than academic analysis. I presented a paper written with Caleb Derven (UL) and we had the only paper with a formal literature review section of which I am aware.

My takeaway impressions

Software and servers

Libraries have moved away from holding their own software on their own servers in recent years.

In the repository space I think that libraries are going to have to revisit this. The most interesting solutions involve customisation by libraries – local developers and technically competent staff are required to implement the type of changes that produce the best results.

Community Development

Islandora, Hydra, Fedora and DSpace are now all being developed through community sprints. This is an alternative both to centralised development and to a policy where individuals contribute patches based on their own needs. Instead, the major development will be done in community sprints where a consensus is sought about what issues need to be addressed. These are then worked on collectively – this can involve providing developers time but it can also involve librarians and other users writing documentation, or forming working groups to come up with best practice or suggested ways of working.

Developing Standards

An interesting aspect of open repositories is the development of work which is shared across communities. The Portland Common Data Model is one example of this. It began as an attempt to find a way to model resources in Hydra based repositories. It was widened out to other Fedora based repositories. After OR2015 it looks as though it will now also be taken up within the DSpace community.

Open Repositories 2016 will be hosted by Trinity College Dublin and will take place in June 2016. As a conference it represents a unique opportunity to learn more about the trends and developments in the field. I think it will be well worth heading along. For more details see: http://or2016.net/

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