

Editorial Board Thoughts: Information Technology in Libraries: Anxiety and Exhilaration

Mark Cyzyk

A few weeks ago a valued colleague left our library to move his young family back home to Pittsburgh. Insofar as we were a two-man department, I spent the weeks following the announcement of his imminent departure picking his brain about various projects, their codebases, potential rough spots, existing trouble tickets, etc. He left, and I immediately inherited nine-years-worth of projects and custom code including all the "micro-services" that feed into our various well-designed, high-profile, and high-performing (thanks to him) Websites.

This was all, naturally, anxiety-producing.

Almost immediately, things began to break.

Early on, a calendar embedded in a custom WordPress theme crucial to the functioning of two of our revenue-generating departments broke. The external vendor simply made disappear the calendar we were screenscraping. Poof, gone. I quickly created an OK-but-less-than-ideal workaround and we were back in business, at least for the time being.

Then, two days before the July 4 holiday, our Calendar Managers started reporting that our Google-Calendar-based system was disallowing a change to "CLOSED" for that Saturday. I somehow forced a CLOSED notification, at least for our main library building, but no matter what any of us did we could not get such a notification to show up for a few of our other facilities. I spent quite bit of time studying the custom, middleware code that sits between our Google Calendars and our Website, and could see where the magic was happening. I now think I know what to do -- and all I have to do is express it in that nutty programming language/platform that the kids are using these days, Ruby on Rails. I've never written a line of Ruby in my life, but it's now or never.

A little voice inside me keeps saying, "You're swimming in the deep end now -- paddle harder, and try not to sink."

While these surprise events were happening, we also switched source code management systems, so a migration was in order there, my longingly-awaited new workstation came in (and I'm sure you all know how painstaking it is to migrate all idiosyncratic data/apps/settings to a new workstation and ensure it's all present, functioning, and secure before DBAN-nuking your old drives), we decommissioned a central service that had been in

Mark Cyzyk (mczyzyk@jhu.edu) a member of the ITAL Editorial Board, happily works and ages in The Sheridan Libraries, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland, USA.

production since 2006, we fully upgraded our Wordpress Multisite including all plugins and themes, fixing what broke in the upgrade, and I got into the groove of working on any and all trouble tickets/change requests that spontaneously appeared, popping up like mushrooms in the verdant vale of my worklife.

This was all largely in addition to my own job.

So now I find myself surgically removing/stitching up code in recently-diseased custom Wordpress themes, adding Ruby code to a crucial piece of our Website infrastructure, and learning as much as I can -- but quick -- about the wonderful and incredibly powerful Bootstrap framework upon which most of our sites are built.

Surely it's anxiety-producing? You bet.

But it's thrilling and exhilarating was well. I'm paddling hard, and so far my head remains above water. Many days, I just can't wait to get to work and start paddling.

This aging IT Guy suddenly feels ten years younger!

(But isn't all this paddling supposed to somehow result in a Swimmer's Body? Patiently waiting...)