

Chapter 2

Processes for User-Centered Design and Development: The Omeka Curator Dashboard Project

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ABSTRACT

The authors discuss user-centered design and agile project management using the development of the Omeka Curator Dashboard as a case study. The University of California, Santa Cruz University Library developed a suite of 15 plugins for the Omeka open source content management system. This chapter describes the library's use of agile principles and methods for the management of this project, detailing the creation of user stories and acceptance criteria. This chapter also outlines the usability testing conducted by the library in the form of online surveys and moderated field tests. The authors conclude that user-focused, inclusive, and iterative development are key components to the success of the software development process.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses user-centered software development projects and their management using the development of the Omeka Curator Dashboard by the University Library at the University of California, Santa Cruz as a case study. This chapter introduces the reader to Omeka, an open source content management system

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designed by the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media at George Mason University for digital asset management and digital exhibit creation. Omeka is used by a variety of libraries, museums, and academic researchers.

The University of California, Santa Cruz University Library developed a suite of 15 plugins to expand the functionality of Omeka in the areas of collection building, description, management, and preservation. The library managed the development project using an agile project management approach. This chapter describes the benefits of using agile for this type of development work and details the library's utilization of user stories to support a user-centered approach to plugin design. The library also conducted usability testing to reveal problematic aspects of plugins and discover potential future enhancements. This chapter describes the library's use of both online surveys and moderated field testing.

BACKGROUND

Libraries and archives are increasingly focusing their staff expertise on curating and disseminating the digitized primary source materials in their archival collections. As part of this effort, archivists and curators see an increased need to engage and connect researchers directly to those materials (Theimer, 2010). Crowdsourcing transcriptions and other descriptive information is one way to engage users, but as Trevor Owens (2012) of the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) stated in his blog post, crowdsourcing transcription or tagging should not be considered the ultimate end goal. Instead the goal of participatory archives projects should be to improve user engagement and understanding of the institution and its collections. The *2015 NMC Horizon Report: Museum Edition* states that two short-term trends for museums and archives include the expansion of the concept of patrons to include both in-person and virtual visitors and the increasing focus on participatory experiences on-site and online (p. 16). The report further explains one of the significant challenges facing museums is the need to improve digital literacy of museum professionals (p. 24). The authors of this chapter assert that libraries and archives face that same challenge. The director of the Scholars' Lab at the University of Virginia Library, Bethany Nowviskie calls on libraries with research and development teams to engage in "creative, iterative, unfettered, informal, (even gonzo?) development of digital scholarly interfaces and content" (p. 55). Digital humanist Cris Alen Sula describes a model where libraries can truly engage digital humanities scholars and support their projects by promoting skills and leveraging the user-centered service paradigm accepted by most libraries (p. 24). Faced with the challenge of developing systems to support digital humanists and to engage users with digital content while keeping that development creative and iterative,

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