Developing a Personalised Medical Library Portal

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The Central Medical Library (CMK) at the Medical Faculty, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia created its website in 1997 and since then has been actively involved in its maintenance and improvement. Its digital library is under rapid development, with permanently growing number of full text journals and databases. The analysis of our website usage revealed an increasing interest among the Slovene biomedical community especially for full text resources. By using data mining methods we discovered user navigation patterns, some of which were quite unexpected. Patrons have often complained to librarians about information overload and difficulty to follow all websites enhancements. Such a situation demanded for a dynamic restructuring of the CMK website. Often such problems are solved with customisable and personalised library portals because they address the modern library role directly by being customer focused, responding to customer needs, and empowering users to create personal information systems that are responsive to their individual needs. That is why we started to develop a personalised medical library portal. As we have limited financial and human resources, we decided to customise and extend an existing library portal software solution. We were especially interested in portal software from the higher education community and libraries as these solutions are usually being distributed under GNU Public Licence as open source code. We selected the MyLibrary library portal software from the North Carolina State University because it is the best documented of such projects, and has a well-developed and fairly intuitive interface for both users and administrators. We not only customised the MyLibrary portal for our library, but we also added some important new functionality, must notably multilingual support. Multilingual-support means that the user can select a language in which the portal interface is presented to her/him. Our extensions to the MyLibrary portal required changes both to the underlying data model and to the corresponding CGI Perl scripts which deal with the user and administrative interfaces. We would like to share our experience with developing a personalised medical library portal because we believe it is applicable to other European libraries, most of which usually offer information in at least two languages.