After years of working with a merely usable CMS, it has been a joy to work with a CMS designed with libraries in mind.

One of the toughest challenges in an academic library systems office is how to manage and present the extensive selection of electronic resources from a variety of vendors. At York College of Pennsylvania, we participated in an admissions-driven web revision cycle and used a campus-provided CMS for 8 years. During this time, we tried very hard not to be the proverbial square peg in the round hole, but eventually we convinced our administration that the complexity of our web vision required a CMS designed specifically for libraries. This article will share our experience on how we selected, bought, and implemented Springshare’s LibGuides.
We needed a CMS that was designed specifically for libraries.

York College and Schmidt Library

York College is located in south-central Pennsylvania. York offers more than 50 baccalaureate majors in professional programs, the sciences, and the humanities to its 4,600 undergraduate students. The college also offers master’s programs in business, education, and nursing, as well as a doctorate in nursing practice. York is dedicated to the intellectual, professional, and social growth of its students.

Schmidt Library at York College of Pennsylvania is an active center of student life on campus, and both authors work there—Verbit is the library information systems specialist, and Kline is the systems librarian. The library was renovated and reorganized in 2004 to centralize all collections and services requiring staff assistance in the main level commons—information services. Services are provided by a dedicated team of seven faculty librarians and 14 administrators and staff. All aspects of library automation and electronic services are coordinated by a library systems team consisting of a systems librarian (Kline) and two library information system specialists (Verbit is one of the two).

The library has demonstrated its spirit of innovation with its early adoption of an information literacy course, laptop and other equipment loans (cameras, GPS, e-readers), link resolvers, journal management systems, discovery services, and more. Maintaining engaging learning spaces, providing research assistance, and developing excellent collections locally and through consortia agreements are important priorities.

Schmidt Library’s Early Web History

Schmidt Library’s long history of web design began in 1995 with a few simple pages for use with the Lynx browser. In fact, the library was one of the first organizations on campus with a web presence. We worked with IT to code our pages in a VMS editor. By 1996–1997, we began incorporating simple graphics and switched our editing to Hotdog Pro’s HTML editor. In 1999, our web design skills progressed to Dreamweaver as the site evolved and expanded. We redesigned our site roughly every 3 years.

In 2003, the college administration made a decision to move all college webpages to a single CMS. The college administration, with guidance from the IT department, selected RedDot (recently renamed Open Text Web Solutions), which provided the following key benefits:

• Cost effectiveness

• A nonexpert editing mode to allow nontechnical individuals to participate in web content creation

• Seamless integration for different sections of York College’s website

Expediting the site upgrade necessitated outsourcing some content creation and RedDot training to a local firm. This collaboration began in the summer of 2003 and quickly revealed a number of challenges. The first was integrating a library site with approximately 130 link-intensive, student-driven pages into a college design focused toward marketing and admissions. A loss of available screen real estate led to difficult compromises in ready access to library resources and general site usability. A second challenge was RedDot: We encountered a steady stream of issues with editing permissions, form creation, JavaScript support, and navigation menus.

The sheer complexity of the site design we depended on to meet student needs made it impossible for the local firm to meet the project deadlines with available resources. The library’s new site went live in mid-August, but RedDot training for library systems staff was delayed until mid-September. For almost a month, there was no in-house ability to correct content problems without the intervention of the project manager. Over the next few years, library staff learned to cope with RedDot’s idiosyncrasies but still struggled with numerous limitations. We often resorted to editing in Dreamweaver and then pasting the HTML back into RedDot.

The college scheduled the next major site redesign for the spring semester of 2007. The college contracted with a new design firm to provide a new look for the library’s site and to migrate the majority of the content. The 2007 project turned out to be even more problematic than the 2003 redesign. Here are a few highlights:

• Our campus RedDot manager resigned in the middle of the project.

• The chosen design firm had limited experience with designing library websites, resulting in design proposals that did not match the needs of a library.

• The design firm’s coding expert encountered great difficulties creating our site structure in RedDot and suggested that we delay the launch of the library’s pages until January.

• In an act of desperation, library systems personnel migrated a majority of the library’s content by hand in a 36-hour period to make it available for the start of fall semester.

Library staff members were unhappy with the library’s integration into the new campus web design, and annual assessment results showed that the students were dissatisfied as well. Students demanded the library site be easier to use and more responsive to their needs. It became clear that the library needed an exit strategy...
from RedDot and the campus redesign cycles. The library staff needed more autonomy over their portion of the college website and direct vendor support to facilitate web development. In short, we needed a CMS that was designed specifically for libraries. Our investigation took two major paths: investigation of Sirsi Rooms and LibGuides.

**Schmidt Library Investigates CMSs**

Our investigation began with the vendor of our integrated library system, SirsiDynix. In 2003, SirsiDynix introduced a library portal product called Sirsi Rooms. Early adopters of Sirsi Rooms hinted at a need for significant improvement—content creation was too labor-intensive. We knew it had the potential to be an excellent system for the library, but it needed to become much easier to use before we could consider local implementation.

We monitored development efforts for the next few years, but we continued to have reservations.

Then, around 2007, Sirsi began developing Enterprise, a new catalog discovery tool. We beta tested versions 1 and 2 in 2008. With version 3 in 2009, the former Sirsi Rooms functionality was completely rewritten and folded into the Enterprise product. Shortly after release, we decided to purchase Enterprise as a new catalog discovery interface; we reasoned that we could later begin testing the CMS aspects to evaluate whether they would finally be a viable alternative to RedDot.

Our second alternative, LibGuides, first appeared on our radar in 2007. We believed it would work for our 33 subject pages but not for our entire website. Using two separate CMS systems to create our web content would be inefficient. An announcement in January 2011 forced us to reconsider our position. We learned that our e-resource management vendor Serials Solutions had partnered with LibGuides to allow dynamic updating of e-resource links across multiple LibGuides. Neither RedDot nor Enterprise provided a means of dynamically managing e-resource link updates. As our electronic resources expanded exponentially, keeping links current had become a significant headache. After discovering the reasonable pricing for LibGuides, we decided that it was time to reconsider LibGuides for managing our library web presence.

**And the Winner Is … LibGuides!**

We began testing both Enterprise and LibGuides in earnest as a CMS replacement in the spring of 2011. We built equivalent sample pages in both Enterprise and LibGuides. We quickly discovered two things:

1. LibGuides is easily scalable to hosting our entire website.
2. The functionality, documentation, and support for LibGuides are superior to those available for Enterprise at this time.

The timing was fortuitous. York College was beginning another web design cycle with a new design firm and a completely new CMS. Library system personnel met with the college’s web design team, and the new design firm and successfully demonstrated how a library-centered CMS provided functionality that was crucial to the development and maintenance of our library website. We committed to fully develop LibGuides as our library website. We will continue to use Enterprise as a discovery tool for our local catalog and hope to integrate further bibliographic databases with books and ebooks in the future.

**Initial setup and training.** Implementation of LibGuides began with a brief setup form and a few simple options. LibGuides is remote-hosted, so we needed to decide if we wanted custom domain mapping. Custom domain mapping is useful for creating a more memorable domain name and for search engine optimization. Since we are using LibGuides to replace our entire library site, we ultimately decided on http://library.ycp.edu. We asked our IT department to create the appropriate DNS records and point them at the IP for our new site.

We also decided to subscribe to several optional modules. They include remote image hosting, local backup for content authors, and a monthly XML export of our site. As the campus has a Google search appliance, the latter will allow our IT department to make our resources more discoverable in campus searches.

LibGuides offers two user roles with related access levels to create and...
manage content: administrators and librarians. Administrators have full access to all pages and all elements of the LibGuides systems; librarians are limited to editing the pages that are owned by or assigned to them. We decided to have our systems librarian as the LibGuides main administrator. Also, outside collaborators can be invited to be additional editors on guides without creating a user profile.

When transitioning to a new CMS, it is always important to know the company has responsive, knowledgeable staff. This is one of Springshare’s strongest assets, and its staff has been there to help us when needed. The next step requires LibGuides training. LibGuides has weekly training classes, so there is none of the “wait 2 months for our next one” that is prevalent with many vendors. We were also surprised to discover that LibGuides uses its own product to create an extensive help and tutorial site. It models best practices while providing step-by-step instructions and FAQs for users. In addition, the site includes an active user community.

The design process. Actual work in LibGuides begins with the selection of a number of systemwide design settings. Branding, contact links, search options, comments, banners, backgrounds, color schemes, fonts, and borders can all be selected through simple menus. We will also be able to incorporate branding and design elements from campus designs by using custom banners and CSS to coordinate with pages on campus. (LibGuides also has an API that will allow us to share our content with other campus systems such as the portal and Blackboard.)

Once a basic page structure is set up, creating pages is as simple as selecting what type of content will be included in that page. As with other CMS systems, the basic design consists of one, two, or three columns with content boxes in each. The main difference in LibGuides is that you can select boxes with predefined types of library content: links and lists, RSS feeds, podcasts, widgets, embedded media, search boxes, polls, user feedback, books from the catalog, etc. Delicious tag clouds, Twitter, and Facebook also are all easily integrated into LibGuides. There is little or no coding required for most common functions of the design process. Each of these boxes is individually editable in a WYSIWYG editor or as a plain text box if you would like to add custom HTML code.

The interface has a short learning curve, so pages can be edited easily by librarians with little web experience. The ease of use allows us to have sample pages up in a short amount of time for departmental review. At York College, we have subject liaison librarians, so we will be able to feature different librarians with their pictures and contact information. In the future, we hope to add a chat feature along with Twitter and Facebook links for that subject area.

Management of resource links. More time-intensive tasks that faced our small systems department were the presentation of our e-resources and updating related links as they change. The pages need to be user-friendly and easily show the electronic resources that York College subscribes to, as well as helpful websites. On some of our pages, we have integrated topical RSS feeds. Our A–Z list of resources with their related descriptions was imported easily into LibGuides. With this ability, dynamically updating pages across the site is a one-step process. Gone is the long process of manually updating multiple pages to reflect changes.

Community and sharing. Libraries have been known for sharing information and ideas in ways that are unheard...
in the private sector. LibGuides developer Springshare embraces this tradition and hosts community sites and a “Best Of” site with the goal of “helping you fight wheel-reinvention syndrome.” This enables people from around the world to view many different implementations of LibGuides for website improvement ideas. In addition, it hosts a private community site. People post their ideas or questions, and users at other institutions share possible solutions. The community also shares content boxes, coding, and even entire LibGuides. After seeking permission, you are able to copy the structure and information from the guide of another institution for use on your site. For example, for common uses, LibGuides has made available premade content boxes for easy integration into your LibGuides.

**Statistics.** Statistical analysis of website usage can provide essential insights for continuous website improvement. LibGuides facilitates analysis with an internal statistical analysis package and the ability to embed Google Analytics code to garner more detailed information or to compare to other pages on campus. Usage can be examined at various levels of granularity: by site, by individual research guide, by page, or even by individual links on a page.

**Images and videos.** LibGuides has an image manager that enables insertion of images directly onto a page—perfect for the nontechie librarian. We subscribe to the hosted images module, so all hosting is handled on its side. When you want to insert an image into a box, you can insert it as easily as you would with your word processor. There currently is no real hard limit on the amount of images you can store. As all the image storage is cloud-based, images are uploaded on an as-needed basis without requiring an FTP upload or shared online image directory. Videos from any of the online video services can also be easily integrated into LibGuides. Any large files such as PowerPoint or other multimedia can be stored locally or hosted on a remote server and easily linked.

**Catalog integration.** We have been able to easily highlight books from our catalog, with complete cover art provided by either Amazon.com or Bowker’s Syndetic Solutions. This is accomplished easily by entering the ISBN, title, call number, and a link from your catalog. The book will then appear in a featured book box on your guide. At our school, we are using this to highlight new additions and faculty publications.

**Mobile devices.** As more students arrive on our campus with mobile devices, we are looking into building our mobile web presence. LibGuides can be adapted easily to mobile usage by following best practices described on its help site. LibGuides automatically detects mobile usage and adjusts the pages to fit that specific mobile device.

**Conclusion**

With the goal of greeting students with a new website in the fall of 2011, we ramped up the production of pages in May and plan a soft launch over the summer. We are eager to share our dynamic new webpages with faculty and students. After years of working with a merely usable CMS, it has been a joy to work with a CMS designed with libraries in mind.

LibGuides has helped us create a new website for the Schmidt Library that is both student- and librarian-friendly. We hope our lively new web presence will draw faculty and student attention and increase usage of our resources. We are already considering future ways to use LibGuides for information literacy instruction and just-in-time online learning modules.

Daniel Verbit is the library information systems specialist at York College of Pennsylvania. He is coordinating the launch of the LibGuides and is also working on web development, electronic resources integration, and other emerging technologies including mobile interfaces. He is always working on ways for colleagues and patrons to live better through circuitry. He can be reached at dverbit@ycp.edu or on Twitter at @ycpdan.

Vickie L. Kline, M.S.L.S., is the systems librarian at York College of Pennsylvania. Her research interests include gadgets, next-generation search tools, authority control, the future of cataloging, methods for organizing internet information, and information literacy. She can be reached at vkline@ycp.edu.