Nov 3 LibPress Community Call Script

- **Changes to staffing**
    – As some of you know, in April 2021 our long-time LibPress coordinator Neil Firkins went on medical leave. This turned into long-term leave which had been planned to end on September 4th, but as we were getting closer to that day , Neil let us know he would not be returning to the Co-op and had decided to seek new opportunities. Neil's work with libraries went back to the early days of the PLOT service, the BC Public Libraries branch-delivered service that hosted public websites, and continued on as we transitioned that service to the Co-op and to the new LibPress platform in 2013-14.
    – Many libraries have written over the years to express their gratitude for Neil's service and support, and I know he will be missed.

    – However, a chance interaction with one of our existing LibPress libraries meant that this role was not to be left unfilled for long
    – I would like to introduce you to Christine Wallace who officially joined the Co-op on Monday as our new LibPress Coordinator. <pass mic to Christine.>

    – In addition to Christine, I wanted to take this chance to introduce a couple of the other Co-op staff who have and will be helping with the service
        - Sam Edwards is one of our Web and Operations specialists. Sam started at the Coop in December 2020 and has already made a huge impact redeveloping a number of core elements of LibPress to be more resilient and easier to maintain, and will be continuing to do new developments on the system in the coming months

        - Christine Burns, who many of you will know through Sitka Support, is now the Operational Lead for Co-op Support and we've been working together to ensure that LibPress receives the same kind of tier 1 support you've come to expect from the Sitka team. To that end, I would reiterate that if you are looking for support, emailing libpress@bc.libraries.coop or following the support links at the top of your site (once logged in) is the absolute best way to receive support and much preferred over calling or emailing an individual staff member directly.

        - Last but not least is Jennifer Pringle, who you may also know from our Co-op Support team. Jennifer has recently taken on the role of Training and Documentation lead at the Co-op, and as such will be instrumental in reshaping how we do ongoing training and documentation of LibPress, more of which is to come.

The Survey

- Hopefully you all had a chance to look at the survey results that were attached to this call invitation. If you were one of the libraries who took the time to fill it in we are very grateful for that.

- Generally speaking, I was pleased to see there was an overall lack of dissatisfaction with the quality and value of the service and support. That meant a lot, especially as we've been trying hard to keep things going through some of the same stresses you folks have faced through the pandemic.

- I want to focus on the small areas of dis-satisfaction we see in the survey. These seem primarily to be around
    - the need for continued training offerings
    - the overall control of the site's design
    - and the development of new features,,

But maybe a little background first for context:

- LibPress was launched in 2013 in an effort to provide low cost websites at scale for public libraries and offer an affordable path forward as PLSB closed its web hosting service PLOT. Since then it has grown to over 70 libraries using the service, approximately 55 in BC and 15 in Manitoba. The annual fee is somewhere between $300-500 dollars depending on the additional options you selected and when you started the service.
- This is underwritten in BC by a core grant from the BC public libraries branch, but that's not the case in Manitoba.
- The service uses a standardized template and overall layout as a starting point. These offer some customizations that are specific to each library, but in the end are also somewhat limiting by design - as a way to contain complexity and keep costs down. These were developed after examining over 100 public library websites and distilling down to the best practices at the time.
- When we started the service we adopted the same model as exists in Sitka, which is a "train the trainer" model. That means that all LibPress libraries agree in their initial startup contract to receive 3 initial training sessions, but then to be responsible for training their new hires within the library. themselves

- So with that background in mind, we constantly ask ourselves, how can we respond to the community's needs in way's that are also sustainable for our own staffing limitations on the co-op side?.

Major Improvements since last survey

- To begin with, I'd first point to some of the steps we took to improve or enhance service since last survey/call

- In 2019 we implemented the ability to delegate Menu Editing to libraries. We piloted this with much success with 6 of the larger LibPress libraries who had more dedicated staff looking after their website. Originally we had kept this as a centralized feature, based both on the belief that menu items likely wouldn't (and probably shouldn't) change too frequently, and that the possibility for error or misuse was serious enough that we should do it from the Co-op, via requests. We have since implemented a menu backup system that would allow us to roll back menu edits to the previous day, which mitigates some of this issue. We are now considering how this should be made more widely available, more thoughts on this later

- We heard loud and clear that there were issues with the Sitka Carousel. We completely redeveloped these from the ground up, and indeed revised that work a second time in an attempt to fix outstanding issues. Yet we are aware some issues persist. In our defence - we don't control Sitka, and the majority of the issues have come from the methods at our disposal to get Sitka data out of the catalogue on the fly. As well, the carousels are only as good as the catalogued data, something we also don't control. Nevertheless, we still experience some issues. We know why these exist and the current method to do carousels seems unlikely to fix these. However, we have some hope that new "native" carousel functionality from Evergreen itself will be the solution, and will be testing this in 2022.

- At the start of the global pandemic, in recognition of many libraries needing to shut their physical doors and yet still offer services to the public, we implemented for free an online chat system that libraries could opt into. About a dozen initially took us up on that and some are still using to this day. We now need to decide going forward how to resource for this as we will soon discuss

- When asked, we also figured out ways to quickly integrate content from new third party vendors like Niche Academy

Response to Survey Asks

- So back to the Survey and plans to address some of the concerns. As I mentioned, the three areas that seemed to come up are
    – the need for continued training offerings
    – overall control of the site's design
    – development of new features
- I will go through each and discuss what we are currently putting in place

- **Need for continued training offerings**

– As I mentioned, we currently offer a "train the trainer" model which all libraries agree to upon signing up for the service. However, as is the case in the Sitka service, we have come to see this does not seem to be working, especially with our smaller libraries. We understand the stresses and challenges library staff are facing, so we are proposing two changes in the new year:
  - One will be "continued education" training sessions offered during the year. These will be on specific topics, and likely focus on items that regularly prove more challenging for people like the slideshow or highlights
  - In addition, we also plan to supplement the current training manual with video "walk throughs" that show step by step how to do certain things.
  - We are also considering an annual service-wide "refresher" session, open to all libraries that would cover some of the basics of using the service
  - However we are not positioned to offer on demand or custom training sessions throughout the year for free. We may look to offer these for a fee in future, but that is still something being discussed.

- **Need for more control over look and feel**
  – This probably needs more discussion about specifics. However recently we have completed work on overhauling the LibPress theme so that it will function with the built-in LibPress customizer. This allows for changes to things like site colours and fonts to be done through the wysiwyg editor. Initially we are implementing this internally, which will allow Co-op staff to respond very quickly and easily to such requests. We are also going to pilot it with a library currently undertaking a site redesign to see how easy it would be to delegate this capabilities to libraries who want it. This might become something we could offer in an "enhanced" service

  – We also recognize that the current system of "highlights" on the front page can be challenging. We do still think that amazing things can be done with it, even as it is. One of the reasons we wanted to talk to Christine Wallace is the work she did on Nelson's homepage in this regard, which was all done in the current system. To that end, she will be offering a workshop soon to demonstrate how that was done. And, we are also considering changes to the way highlights work in order to give people more control over their front page.

  – Finally, I would remind people there is a reason for the constraints but that the Co-op hosts many other websites not on LibPress that can look and feel however the library wants them to. If the constraints with LibPress aren't working for you, we would love to talk to you about hosting your website outside of LibPress in a way that fully captures what you want. Of course, at a cost far greater than what we charge for LibPress. But that is the nature of the tradeoff.

- **More feature development**

We asked on the survey what new features users were looking for. Number one was "More control over overall website layout, colours and design" and hopefully the above gave some indication of improvements in this regard

– Tied for Second was "Better control over highlights" and the "Ability to edit the menu myself," which again should be available in 2022.

– Tied for last were "Fast way for patrons to see all items the library has on-order" and "Automated Link Checking". We hope improvements to the carousel in the new year will address the first.

– To be honest, I was a bit saddened to see "link checking" last as my experience is that many of the LibPress sites have pages listing lots of external online resources, many of which have broken links. I believe even though the community isn't demanding this, we will try to address this in 2022 if we can.

– We also had a free form question asking about other items that we didn't list. Many of the requests touch on items already discussed. However one comes up regularly which needs to be discussed. That is the ability to paste code into the site. Many 3rd party vendors will provide you with javascripts or other methods to embed content in your website. Because of the nature of the shared service, we can not simply give the ability to every library to paste whatever they want into their site, because these are actually executable codes which can cause issues. It is essentially allowing a 3rd party programmer unmonitored access to our server. So for this reason we have to not permit this by default. However we are happy to work with you if you do have content like this, and as was the case with Niche Academy, quickly found a way to make it work and yet still keep our security provisions intact. We just ask you - please contact us as soon as possible if you are looking to integrate any third party content into your site. We can let you know what is and what isn't possible. It is ultimately your site and we want it to work for you, but it's part of a shared service that we need to sustain as well.

- **Other development plans**
- **Replacing time.ly**
    – many of you will have received communications over the last 3 years from me regarding changes to how the plugin that operates the site calendars, time.ly, works, and additional fees we were forced to charge. This was due to the formerly small company being purchased by a venture capitalist who decided to extract as much rent from their software as was possible. We have tried to insulate libraries as much as we could from these changes and charges but after 3 years time.ly have given us little choice but to find a different solution. We tentatively believe we have found one in a new plugin called "The Events Calendar" https://theeventscalendar.com/products/wordpress-events-calendar/ Our initial assessment is that it meets or exceeds what the current solution offers, and there model is such that although we will pay a small annual fee (borne by the Co-op) for their "Pro" version, we *own* that code making it much more

difficult for the vendor to play games like time.ly has. We will be rolling this out in the next 2-3 months after first doing further assessments and community acceptance. It will be a large undertaking that we do not take lightly, because in addition to the technology there will need to be retraining and re-documentation. We put this off as long as was reasonable but ultimately need to make this switch now.

– In general, we are also reviewing all of the 3rd party dependencies (mainly plugins) that get used on the site and will be removing or replacing some that are either aging or whose functionality is now replaced. We also aim to make sure in doing so that we aren't removing functionality you expect, though occasionally it may shift the way things work slightly.

- **Accessible Slideshows**
    – We have consistently had feedback that the inability to view slideshows on mobile devices is an issue. In addition, the current slideshows can also be problematic for print-disabled users. So we are aiming to re-implement slideshows in a way that will work for both.

- **High Availability for LibPress Sites**
    – Currently all LibPress sites are served off a server in our co-location facility in Vancouver. In the event of catastrophic failure or major network disruption, we do have offsite backups and other servers not in our co-location facility to restore the sites to. However that currently would require a couple of hours at least to restore the LibPress server from backups somewhere else. We believe that, as "online the front door" to your library, keeping your website available all the time is critical. Thus we are expending effort in 2022 to figure out a way to mirror LibPress websites on an external redundant server, so that in the event of a failure at our co-location facility these secondary mirror sites can be brought into play much much quicker.

- **Making Our Development Roadmap More Public and Transparent**
    – As we onboard our new LibPress Coordinator and rework some of our support and development processes, I do want to commit to being more transparent about our development priorities, what we can and can't do, and why. So you should expect to see a publicly available roadmap in the next few months as well as some communiques about process improvements to submit change requests to the service. But I will again remind you, this is all in the face of a very inexpensive service that needs to work for ALL subscribers and does not have an open development budget.

- **"Enhanced LibPress" - what would that mean**
    – Which brings us to another item that was floated in the survey, the idea of some sort of "enhanced" LibPress service. A third of folks seemed happy to stay with

how things are. A couple seemed interested in standalone Wordpress or Drupal, and if this was you I would be very happy to discuss that further and build a quote for you. But a full 50% indicated some interest in an "enhanced" service, that would retain much of what you appreciate about LibPress in terms of support and stability, but might offer additional capabilities at a cost.

– We should discuss what those might be. I have some ideas but am interested to hear from you all - what things are you willing to pay for that would make the service enhanced? [open floor for discussion]

– Thanks for these ideas and this discussion. Ultimately we need to balance the needs of individual libraries with the needs of all libraries and with the need for a sustainable funded service. So we are going to take all of this away and come back with some proposals by early 2022.

- **Communications, community/service governance, mutual aid between libraries**
    – Finally wanted to also briefly have a discussion about communications, service governance and mutual aid between libraries
    – While many folks responded that "community calls" were of little or no importance, we decided to do this one anyways because we wanted to give you a chance to meet new staff and have some discussion on possible future plans.

    – We are open to other ways of communicating - what for you are the things you'd like to hear more about? What is the best way for you, for us to communicate those?

    – We currently don't have a "business function group" around LibPress, which is the formal community governance structure that is in place for Sitka and the Licensing service. We could do that. However that would require time and commitment on your parts as well as ours. In addition, formal voting mechanisms can end up with inflexible yay/nay responses. Sometimes that is inevitable but I would like to think that we try to be flexible and responsive to ad hoc requests while maintaining the integrity of the service, and so worry that this would actually limit our ability to be so. But what do you think - is there anyone here who would like to make an argument for a more formal governance structure for the service?

    – Finally - we are a co-operative. Not only does that mean we try to serve you co-operatively, in a mutually beneficial and non-exploitative fashion, but it also means we try to foster co-operation between members. The LibPress group on the Co-op web allows for member to member communication as well as broadcasts from us, and many of you are members of library federations as well. So please do look to each other as well as to us, both for mutual support but also discussions on how to improve your sites within the service as it stands.

- We also promise to revive the practice of "shared slides" and other shared content, which initially held some real promise for this shared service but likely needs some more central care and feeding for it to thrive.

THANKS!