Omeka
http://omeka.org Accessed 8 May 2013.
Reviewed by Elizabeth Pepper

Omeka is an open-source publishing platform that can be used by archivists to create and manage digital collections. It is funded by various private foundations, allowing free use of the platform, however, there are fairly sophisticated system requirements for the downloading and use of the Omeka product. Requirements include an FTP client, a Linux operating system and an Apache HTTP server, among others. For systems that do not meet those requirements, there is an alternative Omeka application, discussed more fully below.

After confirming the system meets the above-listed prerequisites, an archivist can download and install the most recent version of Omeka. The archivist can vary the user experience by choosing from a variety of plugins. Plugins are additional tools that add functions to the Omeka application. For example, the Google Docs Viewer plugin allows a user to zoom in for a closer look at a particular document. Users may contribute content with the Contribution plugin. The Commenting plugin, not surprisingly, allows users to post comments. The Geolocation plugin is used to add location information and maps to Omeka. The Social Bookmarking plugin enables users to share items with social networks, while Atom and RSS feeds allow users to track updates to a collection's content. It seems unlikely that an archivist would choose to use the Omeka application without also using the available plugins. It is the plugins that allow a user to interact with the collections by establishing connections between items by adding comments and even making contributions.

A brief review of Omeka-created websites reveals a collection of attractive and diverse-looking sites. Omeka offers more than ten prepackaged themes (such as Dark, Easy Colour and Santa Fe), which can be modified. The available modifications are largely aesthetic, primarily involving changes to color, font or layout. Omeka also claims that websites created with their application are Section 508 compliant. In general, compliance with Section 508 ensures that websites are accessible to people with disabilities, including individuals who depend on assistive products due to vision impairments. Compliance with Section 508 makes it more likely that everyone will be able to access the information on a website.

One example of a website powered by Omeka is the Hurricane Digital Memory Bank[1], which contains over 25,000 digital items involving Hurricanes Katrina and

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[1] http://hurricanearchive.org

Rita. A user seeking to access those items has multiple access points. These points include keyword, item type, collection or location. Users are able to generate connections between items through the use of keyword searching. For example, an unlimited search for "property damage" shows over 550 items. These results can be limited by choosing between Images, Stories, Oral Histories, Video, Map or Tags. (This website evidences heavy use of the Contribution plugin, as the number of personal photographs and stories increased during the course of preparing this review.)

If an archivist's system does not satisfy the traditional Omeka server requirements, use of the alternate Omeka product[2] does not necessarily compromise the user experience of the collection. The basic Omeka.net plan, which is also free, includes 500 MB of storage, one site, the use of nine plugins and four options regarding theme. There are four other Omeka.net plans, ranging from $49 to $999 per year. These include more selections regarding storage size, plugins and themes. However, none of the Omeka.net plans allow the use of files that are greater than 64 MB in size. An examination of an example website created with Omeka.net[3] reveals a website that is moderately attractive, but limited in size and scope.

Websites created with the Omeka products allow archivists and users to link and tell the story between records, their data and the record creators. The nodes are the documents, photographs or sound recordings, which are joined by links or the geographical relationship between them. Omeka provides the necessary tools to permit users to create connections and frameworks. By displaying the connections between data, documents and creators, the Omeka application contributes to a unified user experience.

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[2] http://www.omeka.net/

[3] http://robertandmonnoyer.omeka.net