

The Press Wide Database

Outsourcing vs In-house

(buy vs build)

Island Press History

- Started 25 years ago
- ~35 employees
- Publishes ~40 books per year, primarily environmental
- Non-profit

Pre-2002

- Book data held in a variety of formats
 - Word, Excel, Lotus 123, PageMaker, PDF
 - 3 different databases (CATS, Solomon, Access)
 - paper
- Decision made to move a consolidated set of data
- How to do it?

Why In-house?

- Everybody thinks they have a unique set of problems or processes – we did!
- This makes it almost mandatory to develop in-house
- The idea of a database built exactly for our specific needs was enticing
- And besides, off the shelf alternatives were expensive, right?

2002-2006 The FileMaker Years

- FileMaker database recommended and initially developed by a consultant
- Consultant had no experience in the publishing business and time was wasted explaining our terminology and processes
- 2001 and development was brought in-house (sort of) – in-house project manager and external developer, ex-IP employee

Issues with in-house development

- **Resources**

- many staff may need to be involved and time spent by them is difficult to quantify
- Skilled programmer available?
- Project manager also likely required
- Most people in small presses wear many hats; do they have time and level of skills to devote to the development of the database?

- **Continuity**

- What happens when your developer leaves? Not a good time to find out documentation is not what it should have been.
- Staff turnover; development could continue for years. Can new staff pick up the threads, or might they want to make drastic changes?

- **Changing Scope**

- The more we learned we could do, the more we did
- Responding to staff requests

Deciding to change horses

- 5 years of development
- Untold hours of staff time
- Interface that was neat when database was simple, now confusing
- Not all features complete yet
- FileMaker 5.5 superseded by V7 with no upgrade path, meaning complete rewrite required – the nail in the coffin

Off-the-shelf advantages

- Can add structure to a poor workflow
- May cost less than an in-house solution
- The package may be of higher quality
- You will be able to implement faster
- Cost is more predictable
- Consistent interface – if the product is mature it will not be constantly changing

Off-the-shelf disadvantages

- May seem expensive
- Not very customizable without spending a lot more money (but this is a good thing!)
- May include functions you don't need
- Choose vendor carefully

The TMM Decision

- Mature product
- Used widely
- Based on Microsoft SQL Server
- Same as our distributor – CDC
- Not cheap, but compared with the pain of going through the development process again...

TMM 6 months out...

- Good support from Quality Solutions
- Good rapport with QS staff
- Met and exceeded expectations
- Implemented Phase I within 3 months
- Training relatively easy
- Staff much happier
- The right decision for us

Someone on the Internet said...

- If you have a large, long-term, mission-critical project that is outside the skill set or capacity of your in-house team, where the market has chosen a clear leader, and that leader seems likely to survive for the long term, I would go with the market leader's packaged offering every time.

anonymous