Springshare’s LibGuides: Fad or Investment?

Abigail Connick, connick2@illinois.edu
Graduate School of Library and Information Science, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Abstract
In 2007, Springshare debuted LibGuides, its new reference service software. Numerous libraries have invested in Springshare’s LibGuides program, but many have overlooked whether or not they actually need this program. If they do in fact need it, they should implement a strategy that maximizes the potential of LibGuides. Much has been published for librarians looking for guidance in building LibGuides, but more research should be conducted on whether or not the needs of patrons are being met through these LibGuides.

Examples

**GOOD EXAMPLE:** This LibGuide from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign contains only six tabs, yet provides ample content through the reference sources listed. It was designed as a course guide for the Music 133 class.

**POOR EXAMPLE:** The Bodleian Library at Oxford University created a LibGuide for its Papyri, Medieval, and Renaissance manuscripts. This guide could be useful for researchers, but it is encumbered by its design. It contains 20 tabs and each page contains several links, thus hindering its usability.

What LibGuides Offer

- LibGuides is a software package available for purchase through Springshare that began as an online reference tool to use in libraries. It is entirely supported by Springshare and can be modified via the user-friendly Content Management System (CMS) Springshare has built for LibGuides, making LibGuides a helpful tool for librarians not proficient in coding languages.
- The tool provides:
  - Comprehensive interfaces
  - RSS feeds
  - Video embedding
  - Interactive chat with technical services
  - Course guides
  - Subject guides
  - A-Z lists
- With these tools, a library’s entire website can be created within LibGuides, thus allowing librarians complete control over their webpages rather than relying upon the university’s web designers for design and content.

Problems

- Librarians, on average, spend 55 days each year on the creation and maintenance of LibGuides, yet they receive scant feedback from users.
- When LibGuides are not marketed, they receive little use from patrons.
- Patrons want to find information, not be taught how to find that information.
- The design of a LibGuide is crucial to its success. The aesthetics of the guides are as important as the content on them. Too many tabs, unnecessary content, and a poor layout are some of the culprits of a poor LibGuide.
- The intentions of a LibGuide should be obvious to patrons. Patrons do not want to spend their time ascertaining whether or not the guide they are looking at is a learning resource or a site with information for research.

Conclusions

- LibGuides are not for everyone. Assess the needs of your patrons and determine whether or not purchasing Springshare’s LibGuides is a viable option for your library.
- If your library does decide to use LibGuides, write out a plan to determine what topics should have guides.
- A plan should also be created for each individual LibGuide. Clear, focused goals, along with a strong implementation of those goals, will lead to better designed LibGuides.
- When building LibGuides, anticipate what your users will need and construct LibGuides for those needs. This may include course guides for classes per the instructors’ requests or reference guides patrons have suggested in surveys.
- Only place information that is useful and relevant into the LibGuides. In the example above from the Bodleian, there is a section for general web resources, electronic resources, and visual resources. At their current size, they are not necessary. Trimming them down and condensing them to one page would be easier for researchers to navigate, thus allowing resources to become useful.

Remedies for LibGuides

Know your users
Determine whether your library’s users prefer subject guides or course guides. Learn how they prefer to research. Collaborate with faculty to learn what information should be included in the guides.

Keep it current
Appoint a staff member or have the creator of a LibGuide visit the webpage on a regular basis. Update links and include new information if needed. Examine the relevance of the LibGuide and decide whether or not it should continue to be maintained.

Keep an eye on design
Keep the amount of tabs low. The design of the pages should be consistent. Use the same colors and have a similar setup on the guides to allow patrons to easily maneuver without having to relearn how to search for information in other guides.

Promote it
Make your library’s LibGuides easily accessible for patrons. Include multiple access points depending on their stage of research.

Work Cited

For further information about LibGuides and their role as a research tool in libraries, please go to abconnick.weebly.com/research for the full annotated bibliography.

- Connick, Abigail. “LibGuides: The Bodleian Library at Oxford University created a LibGuide for its Papyri, Medieval, and Renaissance manuscripts. This guide could be useful for researchers, but it is encumbered by its design. It contains 20 tabs and each page contains several links, thus hindering its usability.” *Journal of Library Administration* 45, no. 1 (2005): 103–123. doi:10.1300/J111v45n01_08.
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