

Evergreen Pre-Launch Update #1

July 23, 2010

To: All KCLS Staff

From: Jed Moffitt—Director of ITS

What is Evergreen?

Evergreen is an Open-Source Integrated Library System (ILS).

Our current ILS (Millennium) provides the software for the online catalog that our patrons search, the circulation software that we use to manage holds and check-out books, and the collection management software that allows us to buy new materials, catalog them, and distribute them throughout the system.

The Evergreen System is currently slated to replace the Millennium System during the week of September 20th of this year. While we are working from a project plan with more than 450 specific pieces of functional development, we will certainly not have all 450 in place by late September. That said, there is no particular “go-live checklist” that we are working from. We will be continually developing software through the go-live date, and immediately move into a bug-fixing and performance optimization mode when we bring the system up.

That we can say that we are actively developing 450+ specific pieces of functionality for our system is just nuts. For the 30 or so years that public libraries have had online catalogs, more than 99% of public libraries have used proprietary software systems (like Dynix and Millennium) which have been licensed through a small competing group of vendors. You were lucky if there were a couple of development projects annually that you could perhaps coordinate with the vendor on. These vendors make money by selling the same software over and over to hundreds and thousands of libraries. They are not incented to do customized development to meet the needs of an individual library.

That’s fine when you have a system that functions well and meets all of your needs, but truth be told, while we’ve had better and worse times on these licensed systems, we’ve always wanted and needed more features, better reliability, and better service.

Evergreen is one of a handful of “open-source” systems that have emerged in recent years where the software is freely available to download and develop, but is generally in an ongoing condition of change. There is no central control—no responsible party or managing entity for the software. The cost of an open-source system is the cost of being responsible to develop it, manage it, implement it, and support it effectively.

A friend of mine from Ann Arbor has a speech about the “free” availability of open-source systems. He says that there are two kinds of free: There is free like in free beer, and there is free like in free kittens. Free beer is truly free. You get it. You drink it. You enjoy it. It’s done.

Free kittens on the other hand may be free at the start, but you'd better anticipate the costs you'll pay over time.

Evergreen is like free kittens. And it is the one available breed of kitten that has the inherent design and technical capacity to have a chance to capably run our uniquely huge and demanding array of technology services at KCLS.

Evergreen was born in Georgia, and went live for a large contingent of Georgia libraries late in 2006. Since then, major Evergreen initiatives have taken off in Indiana, Michigan, and British Columbia, and interest is spreading rapidly.

KCLS' role in this evolution has been to take the modestly functional system that is running in Georgia, and to develop it with the wide array of features that patrons have become accustomed to in a large and contemporary system like KCLS. Our project is being watched closely by public libraries nationally with great interest.

In a broad wash, that brings you right up to where we are today. On the cusp of a major system migration that is barely two months away.

We'll keep you posted in the coming days with new Evergreen resources and updates.

Thank you all for your support.

Sincerely,

Jed