Open source has been the center of attention in the library world for the past several years. Koha and Evergreen are the two major open-source integrated library systems (ILSs), and they continue to grow in maturity and popularity. The question remains as to how much we have achieved in open-source development toward the next-generation catalog compared to commercial systems. Little has been written in the library literature to answer this question. This paper intends to answer this question by comparing the next-generation features of the OPACs of two open-source ILSs (Koha and Evergreen) and one proprietary ILS (Voyager’s WebVoyage).

Much discussion has occurred lately on the next-generation library catalog, sometimes referred to as the Library 2.0 catalog or “the third generation catalog.” Different and even conflicting expectations exist as to what the next-generation library catalog comprises:

In two sentences, this catalog is not really a catalog at all but more like a tool designed to make it easier for students to learn, teachers to instruct, and scholars to do research. It provides its intended audience with a more effective means for finding and using data and information.

Such expectations, despite their vagueness, eventually took concrete form in 2007. Among the most prominent features of the next-generation catalog are a simple keyword search box, enhanced browsing possibilities, spelling corrections, relevance ranking, federated search, user contribution, and enriched content, just to mention a few. Over the past three years, libraries, vendors, and open-source communities have intensified their efforts to develop OPACs with advanced features. The next-generation catalog is becoming the current catalog.

The library community welcomes open-source integrated library systems (ILSs) with open arms, as evidenced by the increasing number of libraries and library consortia that have adopted or are considering open-source options, such as Koha, Evergreen, and the Open Library Environment Project (OLE Project). Librarians see a golden opportunity to add features to a system that will take years for a proprietary vendor to develop. Open-source OPACs, especially that of Koha, seem to be more innovative than their long-established proprietary counterparts, as our investigation shows in this paper. Threatened by this phenomenon, ILS vendors have rushed to improve their OPACs, modeling them after the next-generation catalog. For example, Ex Libris pushed out its new OPAC, WebVoyage 7.0, in August of 2008 to give its OPAC a modern touch.

One interesting question remains. In a competition for a modernized OPAC, which OPAC is closest to our visions for the next-generation library catalog: open-source or proprietary? The comparative study described in this article was conducted in the hope of yielding some information on this topic. For libraries facing options between open-source and proprietary systems, “a thorough process of evaluating an integrated library system (ILS) today would not be complete without also weighing the open source ILS products against their proprietary counterparts.”

Scope and Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to determine which OPAC of the three ILSs—Koha, Evergreen, or WebVoyage—offers more in terms of services and is more comparable to the next-generation library catalog. The three systems include two open-source and one proprietary ILSs. Koha and Evergreen are chosen because they are the two most popular and fully developed open-source ILSs in North America. At the time of the study, Koha had 936 implementations worldwide; Evergreen had 543 library users. We chose WebVoyage for comparison because it is the OPAC of the Voyager ILS by Ex Libris, the biggest ILS vendor in terms of personnel and marketplace. It also is one of the more popular ILSs in North America, with a customer base of 1,424 libraries, most of which are academic. As the sample only includes three ILSs, the study is very limited in scope, and the findings cannot be extrapolated to all open-source and proprietary catalogs. But, hopefully, readers will gain some insight into how much progress libraries, vendors, and open-source communities have achieved toward the next-generation catalog.

Literature Review

A review of the library literature found two relevant studies on the comparison of OPACs in recent years. The first study was conducted by two librarians in Slovenia investigating how much progress libraries had made toward the next-generation catalog. Six online catalogs...