



Interim Performance Report for IMLS Grant, LG-24-07-0005-07
***Omeka*, A Free, Open Source, Standards-based, Easy-to-Use,
Web Publishing Platform**

November 11, 2009

Executive Summary

The Center for History and New Media (CHNM) continues to make great strides in disseminating *Omeka* <omeka.org>. We released the stable 1.0 version in June, and a subsequent bug fix release in October that responded to needs and demands of our community. Since our last report, *Omeka* has been downloaded over 2200 times. The museum and library world has shown tremendous interest in using *Omeka* and we have begun to see more sites built with the software package.

Development and Use

We released *Omeka* 1.0 in June, approximately six months ahead of the grant's work plan, and doubled the number of plugins available. We successfully launched translators that import data exported from CMS's in CSV (comma separated value) and OAI-PMH (Open Archive Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting) formats. In an effort to encourage museums and libraries to make their materials more accessible and available, we developed another plugin that makes any *Omeka* site OAI harvestable. These translators have been very popular and are appealing to our user base.

As the development team continues to strengthen the core's functionality and extending it through plugins, the outreach team continues to reach out to developer and end user communities. The developers list on Google Groups is growing and serves as a problem solving space where individuals contribute ideas, bug fixes, and seek helping testing new themes and plugins. We host regular IRC channel <irc.freenode.net/#omeka> chats on Friday afternoons when the *Omeka* team is available for live support.

To evaluate and enhance the support we offer our community, we convened a documentation working group in May and have been working closely with a variety of users. As a result, we organized a "developer's documentation blitz" to reorganize and write instructions for the theme and plugin API. We implemented other suggestions and encouraged individuals in the working group to contribute to the *Omeka* documentation wiki. We also recorded an updated set of screencast tutorials for 1.0 to further assist new adopters, available both on omeka.org (http://omeka.org/codex/Omeka_Tutorials) and on Vimeo.net (<http://vimeo.com/omeka>).

Visits to the *Omeka* “Sandbox,” where potential users can test out the software before downloading, increased slightly since our last report with nearly 2500 people logging into its administrative interface. To extend *Omeka* training beyond the “sandbox” and screencast tutorials we already offer, we began hosting informal workshops called Playdates. For each Playdate, we invite end users, developers, and designers to learn about, discuss, and build something using *Omeka*. We have also given workshops for select groups, including federal librarians.

Increased interest in using and learning more about *Omeka* is evident an increased number of downloads—over 2200—and increased site visitation—over 133,000 visits—in the past six months. Interest has remained strong because the *Omeka* team maintains a strong presence at museum, library, and digital humanities conferences and meetings, and through social networking sites such as Twitter.

Since our last report, we have seen the number of *Omeka* sites grow within and outside the United States, built by libraries, museums, historical societies, and collaboration among them. A number of undergraduate and graduate level classes are incorporating *Omeka* as a platform for building digital public history sites. Additionally, teachers participating in two Teaching American History grants are learning to build exhibits and teach with *Omeka*. Examples of *Omeka*-powered sites that have recently launched include the following:

- Great Awakening: Spiritual Revival in Colonial America, <http://greatawakeningdocumentary.com/>, ShowForth, BJU Press
- Inventing Europe, <http://www.inventingeurope.eu/invent/> European Science Foundation and the Foundation for the History of Technology
- Magsaysay Awardees Digital Collection, <http://www.rmaf.org.ph/madc/>, Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation
- Medieval and Early Modern Greek Digital Library, <http://library.early-modern-greek.org/>, Notis Toufexis
- Memorial Stadium 1924-1992, <http://brickhouse.lib.umn.edu/>, University of Minnesota Libraries
- Stanislaus River Digital Archive, <http://stanislausriver.org/>, Roy Tennent
- Teaching and Learning Cleveland, <http://csudigitalhumanities.org/exhibits/>, Center for Public History & Digital Humanities, Cleveland State University

Features and Plugins

Since our last report, we released *Omeka 1.0* in June and accompanying upgraded plugins and themes; twelve new plugins, plus one contributed by a community developer; and a bug fix release version *Omeka 1.1* in October. New with *Omeka 1.0* included an improved exhibit builder, support for associating and displaying file-type icons, JPEG2000 support, and new import plugins, including a CSV importer and an OAI-PMH harvester. Moreover, with the addition of an OAI-PMH repository plugin, any *Omeka* site can now serve as an OAI provider. An enhanced JSON output makes exchanging *Omeka* data easier than ever.

To address the needs of museums and libraries wishing to interact with their visitors and users through mobile devices, we also developed plugins that work especially well with mobiles. Bar Codes and Reports, Send to Mobile, and Location-based Search (see explanations below) work to bring visitors and users closer to collections and encourage meaningful interaction around museum content and objects by relying on mobile phones visitors carry with them.

New plugins include the following:

- Atom Output: Adds the Atom Syndication Format to the list of available output formats.
- Bar Code and Reports: Generates report documents from *Omeka* items, including bar codes. The plugin creates a PDF with printable QR Codes for *Omeka* items. Mobile phone users can scan the code and will be sent directly to the site where they can learn more about an object on display in an exhibit.
- MediaRSS plugin for Cooliris image viewer: Adds a MediaRSS feed to page templates, making images available in a slideshow through the CoolIris Firefox extension.
- CSV Import: Imports items, tags, and files from comma-separated value files exported from collection management systems or other databases.
- Dublin Core Extended: Adds the full set of Dublin Core properties to the existing Dublin Core element set, including element refinements and supplemental elements.
- Image Annotation: Allows site administrators and users to annotate images, similar to the process available in Flickr.
- OAI-PMH Harvester: Provides an easy way to import data records, including CDWA-Lite from OAI-PMH data providers into an *Omeka* site.
- OAI-PMH Repository: Exposes public *Omeka* items using OAI-PMH and makes them shareable and harvestable by other OAI-readers.
- Tag Bandit: Adds a bulk tag manipulator, available for batch adding tags on multiple items.
- Enhanced JSON Output: Creates a lightweight data feed of information from an *Omeka* website, including item and collection information.

Mobile-related plugins:

- Bar Code and Reports: (see above)
- Location-based-search: Extends the Geolocation plugin, and allows individuals to search for items in an *Omeka* site based upon a specific street address, or latitude/longitude.
- Send to Mobile: Allows web visitors to send information about the location and institution of an artifact to a mobile device, either by text message or email. If a user visits the website prior to a museum visit, they can conveniently use this as a way to remember things to see during their visit. Or, a user may text a nearby friend or family member to ask them to come over and see a cool artifact. Similarly, users can easily text object links to friends who might be visiting a venue in the near future. Users without smart phones can easily use text messaging (SMS) to share information and access content from an institution's website.

Submitted by *Omeka* Community:

- Creative Commons Chooser: Allows users to choose a type of Creative Commons license for individual items.

Dissemination and Recognition

The project team continues to promote the use of *Omeka* to museum, public history, and library audiences in a variety of ways. We regularly update stakeholders through the project blog and the development Trac Wiki. We communicate with other users using the social networking sites, including Twitter and Facebook, and we have a presence on Vimeo and Flickr. Twitter has been particularly useful in reaching user-testers and for collecting feedback. The team also responds to questions and comments posted to the Forum and on the Google development group.

Omeka recently received attention and when two museum professionals active in the fields of museum technology demonstrated that a museum website could be built in a day, and they chose *Omeka* as a platform in their Museum in a Day project (<http://museuminaday.com/>). After working with *Omeka*, the project team commented, “The *Omeka* approach is great – we can’t stress enough how impressed we were with the site, the documentation, the system itself.” We plan to reach out to the Museum in a Day team to get more extensive feedback and suggestions.

During the past six months, Co-Directors Sharon Leon and Tom Scheinfeldt have consulted with many museums, libraries, and digital humanities scholars encouraging them to adopt *Omeka*. In addition, Scheinfeldt presented *Omeka* to the American Association of Museums Annual Meeting (May); New Hampshire Library Association Conference (May); Society for Scholarly Publishing (May); Fluid Engage Meeting (June); APIs for the Humanities Workshop (October); Smith College (November); and UMass, Amherst (November). Leon presented *Omeka* at the Society of American Archivists Conference (August) and the Western Museum Association Conference (October). She also conducted in-depth workshops with teachers participating in the Sounds of American History and Teaching and Learning Cleveland Teaching American History grant workshops, organized by the Center for Public History and Digital Humanities at Cleveland State University. Development Team Leader Jeremy Boggs and Developer Community Lead Dave Lester discussed *Omeka* at Digital Humanities 2009 Conference (June), National Educational Computing Conference (June), and The Humanities and Technology Camp (THATCamp) (June). Boggs facilitated workshops at the Cooperstown Museum Studies program (September), and the Metropolitan New York Library Council (September). Lester also presented at the Innovation in eLearning Symposium (June), and continued to provide support to the developer community. End User Community Lead, Sheila Brennan, continued to provide ongoing support for major partner Minnesota Historical Society and other end users. Boggs, Brennan, and Lester facilitated a “playdate” workshop in June for nearly fifty digital humanists and two workshops in July for groups of librarians from George Washington University and librarians working at federal agencies.

Finally, George Mason University's community and alumni magazine, *Mason Spirit*, featured a story on the development of *Omeka* and highlighted projects created with it by the Newberry Library in Chicago and Cleveland State University.

Future Features

The *Omeka* team is currently working on development of the hosted version, housed at Omeka.net. We plan to make an invitation-only alpha version available in early 2010. With feedback from our early testers, we plan to release the hosted beta in the spring. Building a hosted version has presented the team with some challenges, but our developers are working through issues methodically to ensure that the launch of Omeka.net will serve a different set of users.

Overall, we continue to be pleased with the progress of the project and the warm reception that *Omeka* has received within the cultural heritage community. We have high hopes for the coming months, and we would welcome further input from and discussion with the IMLS staff as our work continues. Please feel free to contact either of us at any time, should you wish to visit the Center or to learn more about the upcoming Omeka.net.

Sincerely,

Tom Scheinfeldt
Managing Director
jscheinf@gmu.edu
703-993-4213

Sharon M. Leon
Director of Public Projects
sleon@gmu.edu
703-993-3831