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**From the Selected Works of Todd A. Bruns**

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## Book Review: Open Source Web Applications for Libraries

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Available at: [https://works.bepress.com/todd\\_bruns/11/](https://works.bepress.com/todd_bruns/11/)

OPEN SOURCE WEB APPLICATIONS FOR LIBRARIES. Coombs, Karen A., and Hollister, Amanda J. Medford, NJ: Information Today, Inc., 2010, xii + 257 pp., ebrary ebook \$54 (multiple users) or \$36 (single user), print \$39.50, ISBN 9778-1-57387-400-7

*Open Source Web Applications for Libraries* is an introduction to resources that, to paraphrase the authors, most librarians consider either difficult to install or as not providing the functionality they're looking for. Authors Karen Coombs and Amanda Hollister intend for this book to increase librarians' understanding of what these tools are, how they are used, and how they may benefit one's library. The authors meet these goals successfully, providing a very worthy text for librarians interested in investigating open source.

Coombs and Hollister wisely construct a book structure that leads the reader into the subject by first introducing the concept of open source. This introductory chapter positions the reader to understand the chapters that follow, establishing a base for a progressively increasing understanding as one reads the book. This grounding is clearly meant to reduce librarian hesitancy to the phrase "open source" and is quite effective. For more tech-savvy readers there are individual sections for open source applications, so one can jump to particular areas of interest if they wish.

Chapters two and three establish the necessary prerequisites of open source applications: a web server and web access. Chapter two introduces the Linux, Apache, MySQL, PHP (LAMP) stack, which is, as the authors note, "the backbone" of most open source applications. Coombs and Hollister do a good job of explaining each piece of the LAMP stack so that a non-technical reader can understand what each is and how each part contributes to making a web server. Additional sections on Perl, Ruby on Rails, and XAMPP are helpful. Coombs and Hollister not only describe various alternatives but also offer helpful critiques as well. For those of us who aren't "techies," getting forewarnings such as "Rails has been critiqued in the past for not scaling up well" (page 17) is helpful. Chapter three provides the reader with various web-hosting options to consider.

After the authors have established the groundwork with the first three chapters, they turn to introducing open source applications. The applications are divided into sections based on use: Blogs and Wikis, Content Management Systems, Reference and Instruction Tools, and Resource Discovery Tools. This is helpful not only organizationally but also for applying open source applications to various libraries needs. In each section the authors provide a general introduction before launching into each application. The open source application chapters are thorough and easy to read. The authors explain what the application does, how to install and customize it, and in some cases offer a comparison of applications that perform similar functions. Particularly useful for the reader are examples of open source applications in actual use and descriptions of how much user

support is available.

Minor quibbles about the book are that a more extensive glossary for the real neophyte would be helpful (for example, not everyone will know what “extensible” or “scalable” mean), and in this reviewer’s opinion the authors mildly downplay the difficulty smaller libraries may have in terms of the skill level/time investment that open source applications require. That being said this book is a very helpful introduction and survey to the topic, and having been a long-time user of one of the applications being discussed (LibStats, page 168), from this reviewer’s perspective the authors have been quite accurate in their application descriptions. An eventual new edition that covers additional applications (Xerxes, perhaps?) would be welcome.

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