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Everyone Deserves a Badge!

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Everyone Deserves a Badge!

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There's something great happening in California, Arizona, and Virginia and it's all about summer reading. It began when Maricopa County Library District ([MCLD](#)) developed the first ever open source summer reading program (SRP) software. Their software, The Great Reading Adventure, (<http://greatreadingadventure.com/>), was the brain child of an MCLD staffer who garnered support from his library and received a nice infusion of IMLS grant funding. Their software was hugely popular. For one thing, what a great name! And for another, the kids loved it. They earned badges for reading and other activities -- and it was fun! Another reason is that The Great Reading Adventure (GRA) was the first opportunity for many libraries to deliver a web-based summer reading program. Though there are other products available to libraries, those products are commercial products requiring subscriptions that many libraries cannot afford. The Great Reading Adventure was something any library could afford.

After that first year, the California Library Association began working with the folks at MCLD and brought in my company to support California libraries that wanted to use the GRA software. With LSTA funding and our help, even more libraries were able to use a web-based SRP.

After that first summer and with more analysis of the underlying code, we decided that the software would benefit from being recreated from the ground up. Through the support of the 50 Fund, the Legacy Fund of the San Francisco Bay Area Super Bowl 50 Host Committee, CLA had additional funding and we offered to create a new version of GRA. Our plan was to develop it up using a full open source platform to remove

the reliance on using Windows. Initially, MCLD was on board with that plan but they ultimately decided to move forward with their own open source version of GRA but stick with a Microsoft platform.

As of today, GRA and Bookpoints are both based on the original Great Reading Adventure product in terms of functionality. Also, both are open source products, GRA3 is Microsoft-based, and Bookpoints is built as a Drupal application running on Linux. Also, GRA3 is only available for download. Bookpoints can be downloaded as well, but most libraries are using it as free, hosted service through CLA's Reading By Design project. The plan is to continue to provide it as a hosted service in one fashion or another.

As an open source project in year three, GRA has a website with access to the code repository, documentation, a demo, and support (<http://greatreadingadventure.com/>). Our project page isn't as far along (<http://readingbydesign.org/>) but we plan to have all those pieces in place before next summer so even more libraries can benefit from both of these free SRP options.

This project has been one of those rare but wonderful experiences where everyone involved has brought their best self to the table. The generosity of the folks at MCLD allowed us to learn what libraries really wanted and needed in their SRPs. And when we decided to create our own Drupal version, there were no issues with our choice to take what we learned and develop something slightly different. Everyone continued to remain focused on the greater goal: create good and affordable software so libraries can deliver great summer reading programs.



Our California pilot libraries have also been great partners. We've relied on their help throughout the process including year one when we struggled a bit with GRA and the challenges of working on a young and new-to-us, Microsoft-based application. And we have again relied heavily on our pilot libraries as we started developing our own application. It was risky for these libraries to trust that we'd be ready in time for their summer reading programs but they've been patient, have helped us identify and kill the bugs that showed up in the first sandbox version, and now all 39 libraries are busily setting up their sites and getting ready for summer.

The team at the Library of Virginia has been a great development partner. They signed on with us when we decided to recreate the application using Drupal. Along the way, they have brought good ideas, more funding, more pilot libraries, and a commitment to enhancing the assessment component with more visually-compelling graphics and possibly even gamified quizzes. Because of their work, Bookpoints will include engaging reading comprehension quizzes for kids to take shortly after they've gotten going with the program and then again at the end of the summer so we can show the effectiveness of summer reading programs to potential funders and help libraries gain support for their programs.

We've also benefitted from the good work of the folks at iREAD (<https://www.iread-program.org/>) which provides programming resources, posters, products, promotional material, and graphics for summer reading programs. iREAD is a "self-supporting, collaborative effort of the Illinois Library Association" and CLA is one of the collaborators. One benefit of that collaboration is that iREAD artwork is available to Bookpoints users.

And the collaboration doesn't stop there. The best library summer reading programs also rely on community partners to contribute prizes and to organize activities that can earn summer readers points for 'learning by doing' as well as 'learning by reading.' In Bookpoints (and GRA), participants can get points for reading a book, reading for a number of minutes, reading a number of pages, going to an event, taking the reading quizzes, and various combinations of each of these options. Setting up these activities for earning more points takes a massive amount of coordination at the library level because of the time it takes to reach out to potential partners and then work with them to design their activity and set it up with the SRP including defining activities, determining how points are earned, and setting up badges. It's also an opportunity for those community partners to show their generosity and commitment to libraries, reading, and learning in general, by setting up a specific point-generating activity, promoting the event, donating prizes, etc.

It's been a real pleasure to be part of this project. This kind of work is the reason I took up consulting for libraries. I wanted to make a difference in how libraries use technology. I wanted to help them leverage new technologies in a way that they were not yet doing. And there's no better way to leverage technology than to do it with open source software, in partnership with people who appreciate the iterative nature of creating great software, and with a committed corps of librarians willing to put their trust in the process and to dig in. Everyone deserves a badge!

Reading By Design is a project of the California Library Association, supported by the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act, administered in California by the State Librarian.

