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Technology Column, *Public Services Quarterly*

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Publication Date: October 2017

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Slaven Zivkovic, an entrepreneur with a history of library innovations, headed the team that created LibGuides in 2007. LibGuides are websites that librarians and library staff design to help library users locate sources of information for a subject or a class. Zivkovic was a library assistant during his undergraduate years at Santa Clara University, the Jesuit University in Silicon Valley (Springshare, 2017). Zivkovic is also a co-founder of Docutek Information Systems, which created the industry's first electronic reserve system, ERes. He also led the development of one of the first virtual reference systems, VRLplus ("New & noteworthy" 2007).

In celebration of the 10th anniversary of LibGuides, I interviewed Mr. Zivkovic to learn about the evolution of LibGuides and what we might expect in the future. As an instruction and reference librarian for the humanities, I find LibGuides useful tools to teach library instruction for my subject areas. LibGuides also help me assist students who are looking for sources in subjects that are outside my field.

Susan Whitmer (SW): Your first library job was as an assistant at Santa Clara University during your undergraduate years. What interested you about working in the library? What challenges did you encounter?

Slaven Zivkovic (SZ): Libraries were always part of my life. My mom was a K-12 librarian and our home was always packed with books so the libraries were always a place that felt kind of like home to me. When I landed at Santa Clara and enrolled in a work-study program there was a questionnaire I had to fill out about my skills, desired places to work etc. Naturally, I picked the library as the top desired location and fortunately for me I was an engineering major so I had technical/computer skills.

The system librarian at SCU Library, Fred Gertler, interviewed me and we hit it off great right away. The rest, as they say, is history. I was so glad to be spending time in the library and helping librarians and students with technical issues they encountered. As far as challenges, to be honest I can't really think of any – it was a dream job for me as a student so I don't remember any difficulties or issues – I truly enjoyed every day spent there.

SW: LibGuides and the industry's first electronic reserve system, ERes, are major innovations, are there minor innovations that you personally or as a team member developed?

SZ: While at Docutek in the late 90s we also developed one of the firsts (possibly the first?) Virtual Reference System – Docutek VRLPlus. It was one of the early platforms that helped librarians to help remote patrons – included things like co-browsing and real-time chat widget.

SW: Who were the early adopters to LibGuides? It looks like medical libraries and medical librarians have many guides. Is the academic medical field the most enthusiastic user of LibGuides?
SZ: We're very fortunate that LibGuides has found utility at so many different libraries. While medical (and law) are certainly big users, the largest percentage of our user base and the most enthusiasm comes from traditional academic/undergraduate libraries. This is also who our core audience is and where everything started – our first/early adopters came from the academic libraries space. It is also the market that we were most familiar

with early on because I have worked with hundreds of academic libraries at my previous job.

SW: LibGuides are useful as a library instruction tool. I work with faculty to create LibGuide pages that list sources for specific assignments and sources for general course-specific items. Has Springshare done research on the ideal number of sources per page or per LibGuide.

SZ: We are a small team and there are always so many things for us to do. Doing more in-depth analysis of LibGuides content, structure, etc. is on our to-do list because we'd love to do a deep dive and then share the analysis with our community to help them create more impactful content and guides. If there are librarians out there who would like to help and make this into their research project please don't hesitate to reach out to us :) We collaborate with our clients on so many cool projects, and we'd love to work with them on this idea too. So, thanks for asking this question, Susan.

SW: Did Springshare foresee LibGuides being the industry standard for library subject guides?

SZ: That was our goal so I'm thrilled that we were able to achieve it. We wanted to provide a simple, easy to use, and effective platform for librarians – who are the original content curators – to be able to create these subject and course guides. We wanted to address the situation where the librarians either have to become experts in html programming or have to hand off the work to IT staff in order to create useful and engaging content.

SW: How did you come up with the idea of collaboration between organizations? I found this feature useful when I created my first LibGuide while I was at UNT, a Google Guide. I based it on a Princeton Google Guide

SZ: The library profession is all about sharing – sharing of resources, sharing of knowledge… so while I'd love to claim that this idea of collaboration when creating guides and guide sharing/reuse was our original idea, it really wasn't. This is something that librarians were/are already doing in all other aspects of their profession and all we did is applied the concept of sharing and collaboration to the idea of curating content and creating subject guides. The cloud-hosting nature of LibGuides made this an easy proposition from the technical perspective. Since all guides for all institutions live in a cloud, it is relatively easy to "connect them" in the community, so to speak.

SW: Is there one organization that does LibGuides best? Can you provide an example or examples of great guides?

SZ: There are so many – we have always had a "Community" LibGuides site where we indexed all share-able guides and made some "favorites". Recently we revamped the community site so now it's better and easier to use than ever. Head to http://community.libguides.com and you will find a section of "Springy Picks" with so many great examples of guides of all kinds and for all purposes.

SW: Can you provide examples of organizations that utilize LibGuides for something other than library instruction and library sources?

SZ: A fair amount of our clients use LibGuides to maintain their entire website. It's a great solution (and very affordable too) – you can use templates to create your customized look and updating the website content is as easy as creating guides. This makes LibGuides CMS a very effective website solution. To see some great examples of LibGuides as a website you can head to http://community.libguides.com and under Springy Picks select "LibGuides as website" category.

We also have an increasing number of libraries who use LibGuides as an intranet. If you think about it, it's just as useful as an intranet solution as it is for public guides – a great storage mechanism for all work-related content, discussions, news, updates… and with the IP protections and security it's easy to limit access to only authorized staff. This IP protections and security is also a reason why I can't list any examples for you to take a look at, sorry.

SW: I'm thinking about the lone librarian at a remote location who becomes the LibGuides Administrator by default. How does a non-technical person become a LibGuides Administrator?

SZ: We do our best to make it easy for non-techies to master LibGuides quickly. It's important to remember that a big part of what made us successful is not just LibGuides software but also our now-legendary customer service approach. I am thrilled that our tools are being used at thousands of libraries far and wide but what makes me most proud is the fact that we have built an amazing reputation in the library industry as the most customer-friendly library software vendor, bar none.

Our support crew is always ready to jump in and help with any questions, we have weekly free webinars that any LibGuides user (and admin) is welcome to attend – as many as they need, and we have an ever-increasing library of help guides, help videos, etc. that are all available on-demand (and always free, of course). So, the lone librarian at a remote location is never alone in Springshare community – our support crew is always ready to help, our training sessions are conducted online via webinars so distance is never a problem, and our library of help and support content is just a click away. Oh, and one more thing – how could I forget – the Springshare Lounge! Springshare Lounge is our user community that every LibGuides admin (and LibGuides user) is encouraged to join – there is discussion about best practices, tips and tricks from fellow librarians etc. The Lounge is a valuable – and useful - resource for the entire community.

SW: The major difference between LibGuides 1.0 and LibGuides 2.0 is the ability of guides to reformat for any device. Please explain the reason for the upgrade and other major differences between LibGuides 1.0 and 2.0.

SZ: When LibGuides v1 came out – back in 2007, mobile web didn't really exist. In fact, as I type this I realize that this is the same year that the first iPhone was introduced. So, after many years of v1 development we kind of hit the wall in terms of usability of v1 because the entire infrastructure of v1 was made when mobile web and tablets, etc., didn't even exist. LibGuides v2 was born out of the need for LibGuides to keep up with the changing times of how users view content – mobile friendly, device/screen agnostic, usable and accessible. ***Editor's note: Device/screen agnostic means anything that is designed to work across platforms.***

Accessibility is also a major difference between v1 and v2. By coding LibGuides (v2) using bootstrap and the most recent HTML standards we were able to take advantage of the web accessibility tools and standards that simply weren't available in a pre-2010 web. We also made numerous improvements to speed and increased capacity of the system due to the huge advancements in database technology, cloud storage etc. In short, LibGuides v2 is a modern web app built on top of the modern web standards which for the most part did not exist (or were not mature enough) when we sat down to write the original iteration of LibGuides, i.e. LibGuides v1.

SW: LibGuides version 2 introduced assets. As I understand assets, they are reusable items that can be tracked for statistical purposes. How do you describe assets?

SZ: Correct, LibGuides v2 introduced assets both for the purpose of tracking/statistics and for the purpose of reuse. Any piece of content you add to LibGuides v2 is an asset and can be reused anywhere else in the system (or in the community at large, if you give it such access permissions). So, regardless of whether you are adding a new link from a specific guide page, or from the main admin/system asset page, this link can then be reused anywhere else.

SW: Are there any LibApps/LibGuides products that failed? If so, please explain.

SZ: As a small company with limited resources we don't have a lot of room for product failures i.e. we can't really afford to spend a lot of time developing products which ultimately do not work out. So we do a lot of background research on the needs of libraries and actively engage in conversations with our librarians in terms of what they

need, what tools they would like to have which they currently do not, etc. In other words, before we start working on a product we already spent a considerable amount of time researching the need for such a product. This has helped us a great deal in terms of minimizing "product failures" because for a small team like ours this is critically important.

There was one product early on, about 2007/08, that I remember Marc Bertone and I worked out in our spare time just because we needed something for our own needs. Marc is our first employee / software developer – we worked together at Docutek and when I had an idea for Springshare he was the first person I recruited for the new effort – a great programmer and an all-around great guy. In any case, while working on LibGuides we developed LibMarks – it was a social bookmarking tool, kind of like an early version of del.icio.us but focused for library-related bookmarks.

We still have that domain and every now and then we debate how we could bring back the tool in some shape or form. As for why it didn't work out – to be honest we mostly developed it for our own needs and thought it would be a cool repository of librarian-related bookmarks but given our small size back in the day (really small size – there were just a few people involved with the company in the early years) we didn't really have bandwidth and resources to market multiple tools so we put all our energy and effort behind LibGuides. LibMarks – library bookmarks does have a nice ring to it so perhaps we can make it work, somehow.

SW: I'm on the committee to redesign the website for a library association. I suggested using LibGuides but was told that Springshare was already

approached and it was determined that the site was too big for LibGuides. What about LibGuides and scale? Are some institutional sites too big for LibGuides?

SZ: Can we organize a webinar or two for your committee and show them what we can do? We have done significant work in the past couple of years on ensuring that the platform scales very nicely and all signs points that it indeed does. For example, we are powering the library website for the University of Phoenix and their hundreds of thousands of online students. Earlier this year we rolled out worldwide data centers hosted on Amazon Web Services (AWS) infrastructure which further increased our worldwide scalability. So I have a high level of confidence that we could handle pretty much any load that is thrown at us. We understand that LibGuides is not thought of as a website platform but we are working hard to dispel that notion and convince our libraries that they can host a very effective, affordable – and scalable – website using our LibGuides CMS platform.

SW: What do you think of the open-source subject guide option SubjectsPlus (subjectsplus.com)?

SZ: I feel that competition is good for any market, including ours too. It helps us get better and always improving. It's important to realize that pretty much everyone at our company comes from the library world and the majority of our staff (and developers) are/were librarians working at libraries all over the country (and we have a few international Springys too, who used to work at academic libraries) so we fully understand the challenges of the library profession and the ever-shrinking budgets and the like. As a commercial entity we do have a profit motive in that we need to pay out

salaries and ensure the wellbeing of our staff, but I think every one of our clients would agree that our tools provide the best bang for the buck and we were really successful in keeping the cost of LibGuides (and all other tools that we offer) as low as possible.

Back in the day, the libraries didn't have a lot of choices and for any technology/software needs they had to pay large sums that ate a chunk of their budgets. I think Springshare's approach has been validated in that it shows that you can, indeed, have a company that charges low prices yet provides an amazing value in terms of taking care of all the hosting and fixes and continued support and enhancements, all the while offering ample (free) resources in terms of customer service, training, webinars, help, etc. So, in short, I think we were able to differentiate our offering by having not only great software but also even greater customer service and support – all for the prices that are very reasonable by any standard.

SW: What is in the future for LibGuides?

SZ: LibGuides is 10 years old. As most of us who have teenage kids know, once your "baby" enters teens, things change and the baby is (hopefully ;) more mature and more able to process the world view and the demands the world is putting on it. I truly feel LibGuides (and Springshare) is my baby and it has been an amazing journey to watch it grow. The best part, though, is that we are just getting started and LibGuides has a long road ahead – as the product matures and enters its teens, it will continue keeping pace with the latest and greatest web technologies to provide librarians an effective platform to share information and curate content.

The need for LibGuides and tools like LibGuides will only increase, imho – the amount of content and resources available at libraries is only increasing, not decreasing, and even the best search engines cannot replace the knowledge and the curation skills of the librarians. So the need for tools to curate resources effectively and efficiently – for any class, topic, subject, or a project will still be here for the next 10 years, too. Every year LibGuides gets dozens of new features and expanded functionality based on the feedback from our 100,000+ librarian user base. Our librarian users are our best source of ideas and as long as we keep listening to their suggestions and ideas, the future of LibGuides – and Springshare – is bright. What started as a simple product idea in my head has grown into a movement and a community and a growing company offering 5+ products to libraries all around the world. You can expect more of the same in the next 1, 3, 5 or 10 years.

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