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An Open Insights interview with Martin Paul Eve, Andy Byers and Mauro Sanchez

Janeway is a free, open source publishing platform developed by the Centre for Technology and Publishing at Birkbeck to support the Open Library of Humanities' goals. Professor Martin Paul Eve, Co-Director of the OLH serves as the Project Lead for Janeway. Andy Byers and Mauro Sanchez, both Senior Publishing Technology Developers at Birkbeck, lead the development of the platform.

What is Janeway and what is its function?

AB: Janeway is a journal platform designed for publishing scholarly research material. It is developed and maintained by the Centre for Technology and Publishing at Birkbeck, University of London. Janeway provides a workflow for the submission, processing and presentation of scholarly materials.

How does Janeway work?

AB: Janeway helps guide submitted articles through a simple workflow; peer review, copy editing, production and prepublication, to prepare them for publication. It links with various external tools including Ithenticate, Crossref and ORCID.

What distinguishes Janeway from other scholarly communication platforms?

MS: I think the main advantage of Janeway, is that it allows for a great degree of flexibility when it comes to developing your own publishing workflow, whilst maintaining the simplicity of technology stack (Django/Python) for anyone to approach. This comes from both our choices for the building blocks of Janeway as well as from its being our main focus when writing any new features.

Could you say something about the open licensing of the software?

AB: When we were in the early stages of developing Janeway we (Martin and Andy) discussed the licensing issues at length and decided to opt for the Affero General Public License v3 (AGPL v3) over more traditional licenses because of its cover for SaaS usage. Basically, anyone can copy and make changes to Janeway but they must make those changes openly available for others.

MPE: I just got to the point where I thought: why should anyone be able to take something without having to contribute back? I have long been an advocate for the Creative Commons ShareAlike license for scholarly material, so the AGPL made sense to me in the software world.

Janeway is a communication platform written in Python/Django. What motivated this choice over others?

MS: Django (written in Python) is a web framework described as "batteries-included". Other smaller frameworks (often called microframeworks) have risen in popularity in recent years, allowing for a greater degree of flexibility when designing your software stack. That said, such flexibility comes at the cost of more complex setups as well as more time spent on dependency management. Instead, we opted to use Django as it is simple to install and provides all the tools we require to build web technologies allowing us to spend more of our time writing useful features, whilst still being modular enough to replace bits and pieces of the framework where needed.

What motivated the Centre for Technology and Publishing at Birkbeck, University of London to develop its own publishing platform?

MPE: We had a set of specific platform needs and requirements for the OLH that were difficult to implement within existing off the shelf solutions. Further, we wanted to be in control of core parts of our own infrastructure, but also to allow others to replicate our model - hence the insistence on a strong copyleft open license. That, and having some hobbyist time at the weekends, led to Janeway.

You (Mauro and Andy) are both Software Engineers working in publishing technology. Can you please talk a bit more about your role in Janeway?

MS: I've joined the project late in 2018, a few months after Janeway first's stable release went live.. As interest in Janeway around the publishing community started to grow (with some institutions in the process of migrating from other publishing platforms into Janeway), and code contributions started to come in from the open source community, Martin and Andy decided to bring me onboard. Since then, I've spent my time helping to manage the open source side of the project, whilst making contributions towards the reliability of the platform as well as further developing features for Janeway.

Janeway was launched in 2017 and therefore is still in its first years of life. How would you summarise these first two years? Anything to highlight?

AB: The first two years have been a whirlwind. Janeway was started as a side project while I was freelancing after I moved home to Scotland. At that point Martin was also actively working on Janeway (he had some free time, which is almost unheard of these days!). Eventually we migrated a few journals over onto the platform which provided invaluable feedback. Mauro joined the Centre in November 2018 and in that short time has made excellent contributions to our core code base.

We are also now supplying hosted Janeway solutions to Huddersfield University Press, Iowa State Digital Press and the University of West London Library.

What's the long-term goal for Janeway?

AB: The long-term goal of Janeway is to provide a stable, robust and extensible publishing platform that can be utilised for a large number of scholarly communications purposes.

MS: Agree, and further to Andy's comments, we also aim to make Janeway an appealing project for the open source community, with a focus on developing integrations with other Open Access technologies. Special thanks to all the contributors we've had so far.

MPE: I think the long-term goal is to get back from the Delta Quadrant to Earth...