

CS CAPSTONE TECHNOLOGY REVIEW

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MANY VOICES PLATFORM

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Abstract

The Many Voices Publishing Platform uses a variety of technologies to handle different aspects of the project, from the user interface to the backend database operations. These technologies enable to the Many Voices Publishing Platform to succeed in delivering a working platform for textbook collaboration.

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1 Revision Log

Name	Change Number	Date	Description of Change
Steven Powers	1	2/13/2017	 Updated document to new design. Changed selection from Angular2 to Aurelia for User Interface Tools. Increased Readability of PDF and Latex document. Drastically reduced complexity of document, and slimmed down the document from nearly 36 pages to 22 pages by setting better page flow practices.
Evan Tschuy	2	2/17/2017	Changed out HTML option for Latex option.

2 Introduction

The Many Voices Publishing Platform is being developed for the purpose of fixing the problems currently associated with the textbook market. We will accomplish this by giving the MVP Platform an easy to use interface, a search bar with a built in results pane, source control, and many other features. Authorship is divided by subsection header.

3 STEVEN POWERS

3.1 User Interface Tools

Option 1 - React [1]

React is a JavaScript rendering engine that is developed by Facebook. Originally used with Instagram, React is often paired with Redux for added functionality. React is a popular JavaScript library meant for building user interfaces that is component based.

Option 2 - Aurelia [2]

Aurelia is a newer JavaScript client framework for mobile, desktop, and the web, by using simplistic integration.

Option 3 - Ember [3]

Ember uses web components and templates to increase productivity.

Option 4 - Angular2 [4]

Angular2 is a project started by Google for their internal Green Tea project. Angular2 is a widely documented JavaScript cross-platform library that is used to create native mobile and desktop web applications.

3.1.1 Goals

The use of this technology will aid in the development of the user interface. Having a beautiful and scalable user interface will help users interact with the platform more easily, on whatever device they choose to use it on.

3.1.2 Evaluation Criteria

- Ease of Use
- File Size
- Features
- Performance
- Standards Compliance
- Non-Compliance
- Release
- License

3.1.3 Option Comparison

[5]	React	Aurelia	Ember	Angular 2
Ease of Use	Substantial setup re-	Simple setup using	Simple setup using	Substantial setup re-
	quired for working	NPM and installation	NPM and installation	quired for working
	system, lots of docu-			system, lots of docu-
	mentation and tutori-			mentation and tutori-
	als.			als.
File Size	156kb to ???kb, due to	323kb	435kb	1023kb
	added frameworks			
Features	View rendering	Router, Animation,	Router, HTTP Client	Router, HTTP Client
	engine with plugin	HTTP Client		
	frameworks			
Performance	45-50	90-150 (Higher end	60-100	80-130 (Higher end
(Paints		with additional plug-		with additional plug-
per Second)		ins)		ins)
Standards	ES 2015	HTML, ES 2016, Web	HTML, ES 2015	ES 2016
Compliance		Components		
Non-	JSX	N/A	N/A	NG2 Markup, Dart
Compliance				
Release	15.x	Beta	2.x	Release Candidate
License	BSD	MIT	MIT	MIT

3.1.4 Discussion

All of the chosen options have their pros and cons for our web application. All of them however would be a learning and research experience. Angular2 and React have the benefit of being created by large software companies, Google and Facebook respectively. This means that there will be large adoption and documentation / tutorials available. Aurelia and Ember seem to be easier to implement however, they are much newer products and they have a smaller adoption population. This could prove troublesome if we run into problems.

3.1.5 Selection

Initially we were set on using Angular2 as part of the team has experience using this JavaScript library, before meeting with our client. Angular2 has a wide adoption and is used by Google for internal projects so the longevity of the framework is expected to last. While the wider range of knowledge backing Angular2 would be helpful, we plan to use Aurelia as our JavaScript framework for our user interface.

3.2 User Login & Authentication

Option 1 - OpenID Connect

OpenID Connect allows for clients of all types, including browser-based JavaScript and native mobile apps, to launch sign-in flows and receive verifiable assertions about the identity of signed-in users [6].

Option 2 - Facebook

Facebook Login for Apps is a fast and convenient way for people to create accounts and log into your app across multiple platforms [7].

Option 3 - PHP & SQL

Using PHP and SQL to compare submitted usernames and passwords against stored data on a database.

3.2.1 Goals

An efficient and secure method for allowing for users to login and continue editing their documents from any computer or device they choose.

3.2.2 Evaluation Criteria

- · Ease of Use
- Features
- Security

3.2.3 Option Comparison

	OpenID	Facebook Login	PHP & SQL
Ease of Use	Requires Credentials with	Requires Credentials with	Easy to implement, but if
	Corresponding Login	Facebook and an App ID with	setup incorrectly can lead to
	Providers, Lots of available	Facebook	problems
	libraries		
Security	Relies on credential host and	Relies on Facebook and user	Relies on password protection
	user security	security	implementation and user se-
			curity
Features	Easily log in with OpenID	Easily log in with Facebook	Easily log in with user created
	partner credential hosts	credentials	account and password
	(Google, Microsoft, Yahoo,		
	etc)		

3.2.4 Discussion

The ideal user authentication system would be a combination of all three of the above implementations. While logging in with Facebook would make it easier to determine who is using the service, preventing unauthorized users from accessing unreleased copyrighted material, not everyone has a Facebook. Additionally using an OpenID login system would be reliant on other platform holders that use OAuth 2.0. Finally, using a self created account is often the easiest and can allow users to not be tied to a given account and also prevent private information from being retrieved from user accounts.

3.2.5 Selection

For our implementation, we plan on using initially a PHP and SQL system to validate user account information on our database. Additionally, we will look into adding both OpenID and Facebook Login down the road.

3.3 Interface Design

Option 1 - User Centered Design

A deep understanding of the target audience is able to provide insights into how to design and develop your application to suit your intended users [8].

Option 2 - Activity-Centered Design

Instead of focusing on research about intended users, the design and development are focused around making a given activity logically designed [9].

Option 3 - Self Design

The designer is responsible for representing the target audience. Though this can be a poor representation of the intended audience [9].

3.3.1 Goals

A design principle that allows for user interfaces that lead to user interfaces that are accepted by users and are easy to understand.

3.3.2 Evaluation Criteria

- Ease of Use
- Strengths
- Weaknesses

3.3.3 Option Comparison

	User Centered Design	Activity-Centered Design	Self Design
Ease of Use	Long process, that takes a lot	Easier to design an activity	Very easy to design what
	of data gathering to provide	when not trying to cater a spe-	works well for you as a de-
	insights into a target audience.	cific audience.	signer.
Strengths	Allows for the designer to un-	Allows the designer to design	Allows for easy creation of
	derstand what makes a user	a user interface based around	user interface of how the de-
	think the way they do. This	an activity that a user will be	signers see fit. Perfect for a
	allows for an interface design	performing instead of design-	target audience that is just like
	to be molded to an expected	ing to a users wants and de-	the designer.
	user. sires.		
Weaknesses	Takes a long time to gather	Designed interface might	Interface could be intended
	enough information to be able	work well for an intended	for an entirely different audi-
	to design a good solution that	activity, but could be	ence, leaving a confusing ex-
	feels natural to a target audi-	antagonistic to a target	perience.
	ence user.	audience.	

3.3.4 Discussion

The MVP Platform is highly user focused, which initially led the team to decided on User Centered Design. Activity-Centered Design or Self Design would greatly reduce the burden of research and discovery into what our target audience would like to see or be comfortable with naturally. Activity-Centered Design, if performed properly would result in interfaces that clearly work as intended, though might be off putting to our users. Self Design would allow for one of the team members to decide how a certain element shall look, but again can fall into an interface that does not satisfy our users.

3.3.5 Selection

For our implementation, we plan on using User Centered Design. This is because users are our very important for our project. If our users do not like our user interface, then they will be less likely to use our software.

4 JOSH MATTESON

4.1 Testing

Option 1 - Mocha

Mocha is a JavaScript testing framework, loaded with features. It runs on Node.js and also in the browser, making asynchronous testing simple and easy to use. Mocha tests run serially, allowing for flexible and accurate reporting, while mapping uncaught exceptions to the correct test cases. [10]

Option 2 - QUnit

QUnit is a powerful, easy-to-use JavaScript unit testing framework. It's used by the jQuery, jQuery UI and jQuery Mobile projects and is capable of testing any generic JavaScript code. [11]

Option 3 - Jasmine

Jasmine is a behavior-driven development framework for testing JavaScript code. It does not depend on any other JavaScript frameworks. It does not require a DOM. And it has a clean, obvious syntax so that you can easily write tests.

[12]

4.1.1 Goals

Using this technology will aid in proper functionality and minimize errors. Without properly testing code, a number of problems can occur that can disrupt and slow down progress in a team. In extreme cases, not properly testing could lead to failure of the application.

4.1.2 Evaluation Criteria

- · Ease of Use
- Features
- Documentation
- Integration
- Other

4.1.3 Option Comparison

	Mocha	QUnit	Jasmine
Ease of Use	Language is like spoken lan-	Not as friendly, language is si-	Language is like spoken En-
	guage, which makes for easier	miliar to other basic Unit test-	glish, fairly easy to under-
	to understand	ing frameworks	stand
Features	Spys, mocks, stubs, callbacks,	Most testing is done through	Spys, mocks, stubs, callbacks,
	etc. Most features	assertions only, not as many	etc. Lacks Assertions, but can
		features	be implemented with library
Documentation	Fairly common, moderate	Not well documented	Most popular, abundant docu-
	amount of documentation		mentation
Integration	Moderate difficulty to set up	Easiest to set up	Moderate difficulty to set up
Other			Familiar

4.1.4 Discussion

It is well known that an application that ensures proper functionality supersedes other applications and, more importantly, competitors. Quality assurance is acknowledged as highly distinguished, and therefore, an attribute deserving of notable consideration. Having this in mind, we will be considering these mentioned testing frameworks: Mocha, QUnit, and Jasmine.

4.1.5 Selection

Jasmine, even though more difficult to integrate and set up, would be most feasible. Jasmine has many features that win out over Mocha and QUnit, as well as thorough documenation. The test are easily grouped through describe blocks, which makes it easy to identify where certain problems are. There is familiarity with Jasmine over the other testing frameworks, which means less time learning for the team.

4.2 Revision Control Software

Option 1 - Git

Git is an open source, free, distributed version control system. It's designed to handle small to very large projects with speed and accuracy. It is commonly used by a variety of companies. [13]

Option 2 - CVS - Concurrent Versions System

CVS is the most popular and widely adopted revision control system to date. It is widely considered because of its low learning curve. [14]

Option 3 - SVN

Subversion is another open source version control software used by platforms like Ruby, Python Apache, and more. SVN has many versions and IDEs available. [15]

4.2.1 Goals

Our application will widely revolve around the revision/version control software that we use, which makess choicing the correct one ideal. The main goals for our revision control would be ease of incorporation into our app, ease of use, and the features it comes with. More criteria found on the next page.

4.2.2 Evaluation Criteria

The options are evaluated on

- Established
- Features
- Ease of Use
- Speed

4.2.3 Option Comparison

[14]	Git	CVS	SVN
Established	More than a decade	More than three decades	Around 15 years
Features	Access to tree offline, highly	Basic Features	Atomic Operations, Various
	distributed peer-to-peer		IDE Plugins
	model		
Ease of Use	Steep learning curve	Relatively low learning curve	Relatively low learning curve
Speed	Very fast	Very slow	Slow

4.2.4 Discussion

Revision control will be used frequently in our app to save progress and ensure progress hasn't been lost. This in mind, we need software that ensures speed and can perform various operations inexpensively. While most of the revision control software offers features, only one of them offers the speed required for frequent revisions.

4.2.5 Selection

Although accompanied by a steep learning curve, Git offers all the features and speed required for the operations of our application. Fortunately, most of our team members are familiar with using Git to one extent or another. This makes the trade off feasible.

4.3 Database

Option 1 - SQL Server

SQL Server is owned by Microsoft, and is known for its scalable, hybrid database platform. Being owned by Microsoft, this database is well known. [16]

Option 2 - MongoDB

MongoDB is a document based database, with an Expressive Query Language and Secondary Indexes. [17]

Option 3 - MySQL

Many of the worlds largest companies rely on MySQL, such as Facebook, Google, and others. It is a relational database. [18]

4.3.1 Goals

Having an understandable, well built database can aid in the flow of building an application as well as delivery. This in mind, we want to balance cost with effectiveness.

4.3.2 Evaluation Criteria

The options are evaluated on

- Cost
- Type
- Ease of Use

4.3.3 Option Comparison

	SQL Server	MongoDB	MySQL
Cost	Enterprise: \$12,256, Standard:	OpenSource, but essential pe-	Enterprise: \$5000, Standard:
	\$3717, Developer: Free	riphery software can range	\$2000, Community Edition:
		from \$45 a month to as much	Free
		as \$5225 a month	
Туре	Structured Query Language	Expressive Query Language	Structured Query Language
Ease of Use	Uses Queries to gather infor-	EQL data access and manip-	Uses Queries to gather infor-
	mation	ulation in sophisticated ways,	mation
		operational and analytical ap-	
		plications [19]	

4.3.4 Discussion

The most obvious and transparent qualities for a database are the cost and type, however, databases that come with a free edition allow for us to test and experiment while developing. This is imperative to the development process, and shouldn't be overlooked. Allowing for an easy transition from the free edition to a standard or express edition is important as well. A non relational database like MongoDB could be beneficial when not knowing the type of data that will be stored.

4.3.5 Selection

All things considered, SQL Server would be considered our top pick. Experience using an SQL based database before aids in the difficulty of using a query. Having a free edition contributes a moderate amount into the decision as well.

5 EVAN TSCHUY

5.1 Server Back-end

Option 1 - NodeJS

NodeJS is a modern web back-end framework developed by the Node Foundation, primarily led by Joyent. By using JavaScript its language of choice, Node allows developers to use the language's unique concurrency paradigms to quickly develop scalable applications.

Option 2 - Django

The Django framework is a massive web framework developed in Python that comes "batteries included". The Framework includes everything from geo-libraries to support for four different kinds of databases, meaning a large initial learning curve but a large payoff.

Option 3 - Flask

Flask is a micro-framework. It comes with the bare minimum needed to do HTTP handling, leaving what other frameworks come with to an array of choices from third party developers. This means the core framework is quick to learn, but can quickly leave a developer feeling constrained.

Option 4 - Ruby on Rails

Ruby on Rails is the old standard of web frameworks. It was the original batteries included framework, and has over the years been known for its ease of use. However, the framework is quite old and shows some signs of age, using sometimes outdated paradigms and generally being less friendly to beginners than more modern frameworks.

5.1.1 Evaluation Criteria

- Ease of use
- Language
- Features
- Ecosystem
- License

5.1.2 Option Comparison

	NodeJS	Django	Flask	Ruby on Rails
Ease of Use	Javascript backend	Large framework	Microframework con-	Old framework with
	shares language with	containing all needs	taining only minimal	massive, but aging,
	frontend; super quick	within, with a large	needs; requires find-	ecosystem
	iteration	learning curve	ing external packages	
Language	Javascript	Python	Python	Ruby
Features	Minimal HTTP inter-	Massive built-ins	Minimal with external	Massive built-ins
	action, massive exter-		ecosystem for extras	
	nal ecosystem for ex-			
	tras			
Ecosystem	Massively popular to-	Decently large ecosys-	Decently large ecosys-	Large ecosystem but
	day with expansive	tem with built-ins for	tem	fairly old
	and growing ecosys-	most tasks		
	tem			
Release	7.1.0	1.10.3	0.11	5.0.0.1
License	MIT	BSD	BSD	MIT

5.1.3 Discussion

All backends listed are popular within their respective communities. However, more new projects are being created using NodeJS, as its modern paradigms and sharing of a language with frontend development allow developers familiar with it to iterate quicker and write more expressive code. Django's built-ins allow for a quicker initial development time but mean being isolated from the rapidly expanding ecosystem around NodeJS. Ruby on Rails is a rather old backend, and has not shown to have the modern flexibility of Node.

5.1.4 Selection

As NodeJS has the most expansive ecosystem, and allows us to share a common language between the front and backennds of the project, we will be using it over the other options considered. Additionally, Ward Cunningham's Federated Wiki uses it as one of its backends, and if we fork it, we can continue to use its NodeJS backend.

5.2 Text Formatting

Option 1 - Markdown

Markdown is a highly lightweight markup language that allows easy, human-readable markup of text to include headings, bold/italic/underline/etc, bullets, and numbered lists. The original markdown does not support things like images or videos; Markdown has various "flavors", or implementations, that sometimes allow for such things.

Option 2 - Restructured Text

Restructured Text is a markup language written in Python for writing documentation, simple websites, etc. It allows for highly varied but still restricted markup; it allows for image embeds, fancy linking, titles, etc. It does not allow users to embed arbitrary elements.

Option 3 - Raw Latex

Storing simply raw Latex allows the greatest flexibility, as it is literally the text that will be rendered by the backend. Raw Latex allows for things like image embeds, math text, etc. but also raw include, and as such should be filtered to a subset to be suitable for use in a public-facing scenario.

5.2.1 Evaluation Criteria

- Ease of use for end-users
- Markup options
- Compile language
- Security

5.2.2 Option Comparison

	Markdown	ReStructured Text	Latex
Ease of Use	Easy to use, with minimal	Relatively human-readable	Essentially infinite options
	options and human-readable	markup but with massive	but not very human-
	markup; different implemen-	number of options	readable/human-writeable.
	tations have slight differences		Some users may already be
	leading to confusion		proficient.
Markup	Options readable in single-	Highly featureful with well-	Allows for infinite options;
	page document, not allowing	defined language	controlling it might be diffi-
	for high flexibility		cult
Compile	Dozens of different libraries	Python	Compilation is needed to dis-
Language	for different languages, each		play but it is also the compi-
	with slightly different inter-		lation being used for the final
	pretation of the markup		book, so the render is one-to-
			one
Security	Small language leads to mini-	Well-defined with real-world-	Needs careful processing to
	mal exploits	tested libraries	stop end-users from inputting
			harmful raw input (being able
			to retrieve files from the host
			system)

5.2.3 Discussion

All languages listed allow users to do simple things like bold text and link to other pages. However, Latex offers the most flexibility and allows users to be able to do anything they want. Allowing this while maintaining ease-of-use would suggest needing a way to prevent users from including arbitrary paths on disk to scrape files such as private tokens.

5.2.4 Selection

The Federated Wiki uses HTML with minimal security processing. This shows that insecure languages can still be used, with some precautions. As our books already are rendered in Latex, it will be most reasonable to simply render text passed in from users as Latex.

5.3 Password Storage

Option 1 - Bcrypt

Bcrypt is a password hashing function that takes a very large amount of time to crack an individual password – it is designed to be slow. This means a hacker cannot simply crack a database worth of passwords in one sitting, as with older hashes like MD5.

Option 2 - Scrypt

Scrypt is designed to take up large amounts of time, and large amounts of RAM, when hashing. This ensures that a hacker cannot simply buy a powerful CPU and crack passwords with pure power. However, scrypt, being designed more-so for computer hard disk passwords, can take multiple seconds and hundreds of megabytes of RAM to process.

Option 3 - pbkdf2

PBKDF2 is a function that repeatedly hashes a password using the HMAC, or "keyed-hash message authentication code", function. For a CPU, cracking a large number of passwords using pbkdf2 is difficult, as it takes a large amount of time to crack an individual password. Using a GPU, however, a large number of hashes can be run in parallel, making it quick to crack with high end hardware.

Option 4 - raw storage

Another option for password storage is to store the passwords in plain text. This allows users to recover their passwords directly through a password reminder email. However, this comes with the major downside that compromising the database allows a hacker to be able to access any accounts on unrelated services where users use the same username and password (a common pattern in non-technical and technical users alike).

5.3.1 Evaluation Criteria

- Cracking
- Storage
- Hacking Resistance

5.3.2 Option Comparison

	Bcrypt	Scrypt	pbkdf2	plain text
Cracking	Bcrypt is highly	Scrypt is highly re-	pbkdf2 is highly re-	A plaintext password
	resistant to cracking	sistant to cracking on	sistant to cracking on	does not need to be
	on CPUs and	CPUs, GPUs, etc but	CPUs but can be eas-	cracked as it is already
	GPUs, but can be	takes a large amount	ily cracked on a GPU.	stored as a raw pass-
	cracked quickly using	of time to verify a		word.
	specialized FPGAs.	valid password.		
Storage	can be stored in a	can be stored in a	can be stored in a	Plain passwords must
	database without is-	database without is-	database without is-	be stored in a way
	sue.	sue.	sue.	that ensures they
				can never be hacked,
				which is impossible.
Hacking	A bcrypt password	Scrypt hashes must	pbkdf2 hashes must	A plain password,
Resistance	hash must be cracked	be cracked before use	be cracked before use	once retrieved from
	before it can be used	elsewhere.	elsewhere.	a database, can be
	elsewhere.			used along with
				the username/email
				associated to hack
				other sites.

5.3.3 Discussion

Password storage is a tradeoff between ease of use and difficulty of reversing. Scrypt is too slow for use on a website with many users, whereas plain text passwords are too insecure as a hacker can reuse the password immediately without cracking. pbkdf2 and bcrypt do a good job defending against CPU cracking, but as pbkdf2 can be cracked using a GPU, bcrypt is left remaining as the best tradeoff between speed and cracking.

5.3.4 Selection

As mentioned above, bcrypt-hashed passwords present a good tradeoff between cracking ability and verification speed. As such, the Many Voices Platform will use bcrypt to securely verify any password used with the system.

6 CONCLUSION

The Many Voices Publishing Platform is a combination of User Interfaces, Documentation, User Centered Design, Testing, User Authentication, Databases, Server Back-end, Text Formatting, Password Storage, and the users themselves. Determining the technologies behind these parts and pieces is a difficult task to accomplish, as many choices can satisfy the requirements of the project. Finding the best solution however is the goal of this document, to provide a clear path forward for the platform as a whole.

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