Koha LMS and PTFS Europe support at NHS Trust libraries

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Open source software: user experience of Koha LMS and PTFS Europe hosting and support services

Kettering General Hospital NHS Foundation Trust

Kettering General Hospital's Knowledge & Library Service provides access to a range of knowledge resources (including a catalogue of 18,000 titles) and services to NHS staff at the hospital, in the local area, and a variety of students on placement.

The library team consists of six information professionals and paraprofessionals, most of them part-time. The team ensures end users can find and use the best evidence to support NHS patient care, to enhance their studies and professional development, and to support research.

Why did we need to migrate to a new system?

Koha LMS replaced the previous system at KGH ten years ago and went live in March 2010.

Cost was the primary reason for changing LMS. There were major budget cuts and the Koha LMS provided a system which matched the functionality of our previous system and more than halved the annual costs. We also avoided the cost and upkeep of an in-house server because PTFS Europe hosts and supports Koha. It worked out as fantastic value.

Our IT department welcomed moving the system to a remotely hosted service. It meant they wouldn't need to maintain a local server or be responsible for backups and systems support.

Changing to a web-based system was also a high priority. We needed a system that was available to end-users and library staff from any location. The existing system depended on desktop client software.

Koha also meant we didn't need to upgrade our SIP2 self-checkout devices, which was going to be very costly.   Koha has a self-check function, which users access from a PC. We decided that upgrading the SIP2 device was unnecessary and switched to Koha's self-check. It works well.

Using Koha LMS

Koha went live over ten years ago. We use Koha's OPAC, reports, systems administration, circulation, cataloguing, and acquisitions modules. (We used to use the serials control module, but all our journals are now online.)

We all work from home occasionally, therefore, being able to access Koha using a browser is essential. In the current COVID-19 environment it is invaluable. Sometimes we use a tablet to access staff functions, so the responsive screen technology for the staff interface (as well as the OPAC) is a bonus.

Overall, our staff find Koha is intuitive and easy to use. Using the systems administration module, we were able to tailor Koha's functions, workflow, and permissions to suit the way we work.

We are using the OPAC's reading list feature to compile reading lists on a wide range of issues. KGH OPAC: https://kgh.koha-ptfs.co.uk

PTFS Europe support and hosting

PTFS Europe's hosting is very reliable, and response times are first-rate (better than we were receiving for our previous system). If there is ever a problem, support is excellent, and it is, usually, rapidly resolved.

Support response times are excellent for all types of queries, and we like the ability to tag the importance of the issue on the customer help desk portal, which is straightforward to use.

The support desk will help with SQL scripts, we also use the Koha Community repository to find reports (which has over 300 reports available). We have about 60 reports on our system, some of which are from the community repository.

The upgrade process is designed to minimise disruption. Our system is initially upgraded on a test facility so that we can check it before it is applied to our production server. They install the upgrade at a time that suits us, usually after the Library has closed.

Koha Community resources and networking

PTFS Europe has several ways to network with other Koha users and keep them up to date, such as the Forum, customer days and so on. We are pleased to see that they have started issuing regular videos. The videos cover a range of topics, how to use particular Koha features and introductions to related products. A briefing video about the November release is planned (which we are pleased to see because previously we had to prompt them about new releases). Last month they put on a two hour 'virtual' conference which included presentations from Koha customers. We were unable to join in on the day, but it's available on YouTube, and plan to see it.

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