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SOURCEFABRIC SIGNS AUSTRALIAN NEWS AGENCY TO OPEN SOURCE PROJECT

Global news player sees flexibility as the key to innovation in today's media landscape.

PRAGUE: Australian Associated Press is partnering with open source software house Sourcefabric to develop an end-to-end news creation, production, curation, distribution and publishing platform.

Through Superdesk, AAP aims to better equip its editorial operations amid increasing cost pressure and ever-growing demands for innovative digital products and services.

AAP editor-in-chief Tony Gillies said, "Over the past 10 years, our existing editorial platform has proven increasingly inflexible.

"The time is right for some true innovation in this area and we believe that Sourcefabric will set us on the right path."

Sava Tatić, Sourcefabric managing director, said he was thrilled to be partnering with Australia's national news agency.

Tatić described the partnership as a great opportunity for Sourcefabric to showcase the power and flexibility of open source software to news and media organisations worldwide.

"Sourcefabric is ready to serve as the custodian of the new code base for journalism, which will be open source," he said.

About Superdesk

Superdesk is a native editorial system for managing workflows and production in traditional, digital and converged news organisations. It has been designed specifically to be scalable to suit news operations of any size, and its modular approach makes it easily extensible without requiring rewrites of the base code.

For many months, Sourcefabric staff have been embedded in AAP's newsroom and development teams, learning the agency's strict requirements for accurate news delivery at speed. Being side by side with the journalists as they work is the best way to build tools that enable rather than frustrate users.

Unusually for a heavyweight media player, AAP is committed to open source principles and, as such, has no objections to welcoming other news organisations to the party. Superdesk is modular and scalable, so its building blocks may be adapted, extended and supplemented to suit diverse media business needs.

Gillies said that while commercial systems are a convenient choice, they are “generally cost-prohibitive and don’t speak to the specific requirements of an agency newsroom”.

“With Superdesk, we will no longer be forced to compromise on how we produce and deliver content, because the system will be able to readily bend and flex to the immediate needs of our operation,” he said.

Starting in November 2014, Sourcefabric teams in the Czech Republic, Romania and Serbia will do much of the development, while a contingent of Sourcefabric developers will work alongside their AAP counterparts in Sydney.

AAP and Sourcefabric aim to have Superdesk in production in Q3 2015 – an ambitious schedule, but ambition is no bad thing.

Advantages of open source

Brook Thomas, AAP chief technology officer, said the open source project is “entirely right for AAP”. Other news organisations would be well served to look beyond typical commercial software solutions, he said.

“The current technology climate, especially in terms of open source options, tells us that an alternative approach is highly viable,” Thomas said.

Traditionally, major news publishers have invested in editorial systems developed by commercial vendors.

These proprietary systems are generally provisioned on the basis of a user licence agreement, meaning that a newsroom the size of AAP – about 200 staff – runs at significant cost, especially taking into consideration support and maintenance.

And such systems invariably need a level of customisation, because their features don’t always work the way customers need them to. Superdesk, however, is open source, so users are free to modify the software in any way that works for them.

Invitation to the news industry

AAP and Sourcefabric both reckon that, as the project gathers momentum, other media organisations are likely to take a keen interest. Some may even take up the open

invitation to join in and contribute to the development effort – while tweaking Superdesk for their own unique needs.

“Open source software generally sparks innovation and, ultimately, leads to more options for end-users,” said Sourcefabric managing director Sava Tatić.

Tatić said the initiative AAP has shown with regard to the direction of its technology should be applauded, and he hopes that the wider news industry will watch and maybe take inspiration from the project as it unfolds.

“Technologically speaking, AAP is doing something very different, but at the heart of their decision, they are not losing sight of the main objective, which is to focus on the journalism,” he said.

“We want to empower all journalists with tools that free them from technical distractions and accelerate their output.

“Hopefully, one day Superdesk will swing to the rescue of newsrooms everywhere, no matter their size.”

ABOUT AAP

www.aap.com.au

Founded in 1935, AAP is the national news agency of Australia employing more than 600 people. It provides a comprehensive domestic and international news service to the Australian media, business sectors and beyond – 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Virtually all of Australia's newspaper, broadcast and digital media subscribe to AAP news services. In addition to the news agency, AAP's businesses include editorial production outsourcing service Pagemasters, media analysis company Media Research Group (MRG), and Medianet, Australia's largest distributor of corporate and government press releases.

ABOUT SOURCEFABRIC

www.sourcefabric.org

Sourcefabric is a leader in the development and implementation of open source software for news organisations. Media publishers worldwide rely on Sourcefabric tools for creating, managing and publishing content online, in print and for broadcast. Sourcefabric received a Knight-Batten Award for Innovations in Journalism in 2011, a Guardian Mega Award for Digital Innovation in 2012, and an African News Innovation Challenge Award in 2012. Sourcefabric is based in Prague, with offices in Berlin and Toronto.

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