

## Dan Cohen's Digital Humanities Blog » Blog Archive » Introducing Omeka

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Today the [Center for History and New Media](#)<sup>[1]</sup> launches another major software platform that we hope will be of great help to universities, libraries, museums, historians, researchers, and anyone else who would like to put a collection or exhibit online. It's called [Omeka](#)<sup>[2]</sup>, from the Swahili word meaning “to display or layout goods or wares; to speak out; to spread out; to unpack.” The public

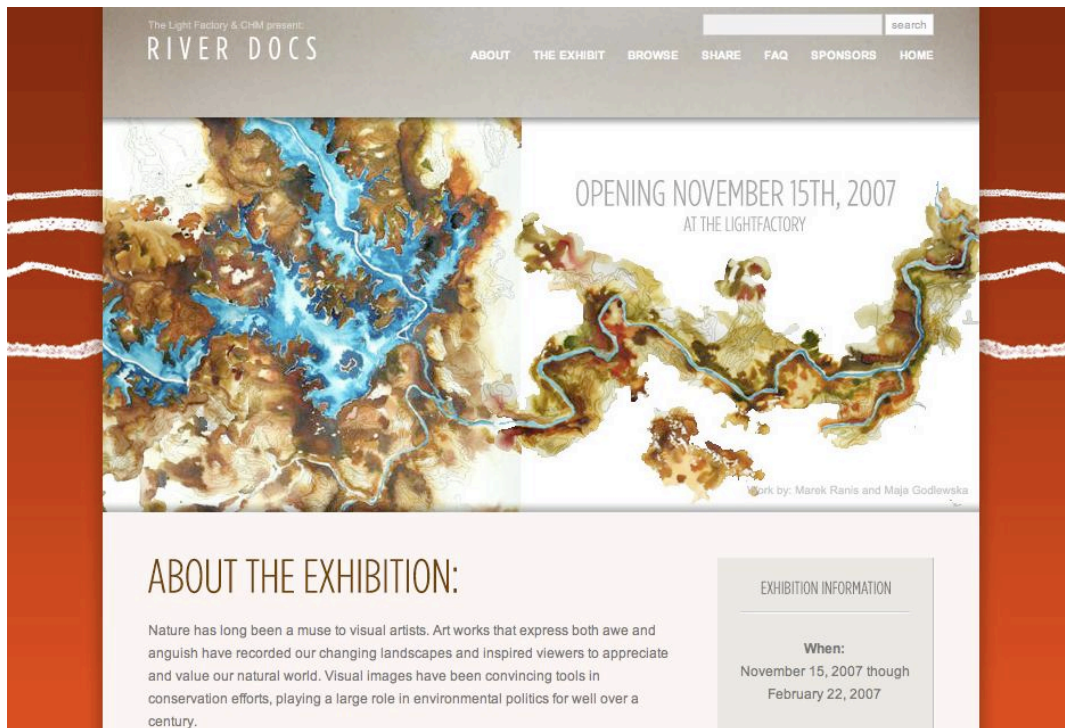
beta released today was underwritten by the generosity of the [Alfred P. Sloan Foundation](#)<sup>[3]</sup> and the [Institute of Museum and Library Services](#)<sup>[4]</sup>.

I'll get to the details momentarily, but I've found that it's often helpful to brashly distill years of careful thought, design, and programming into a handy catchphrase that anyone can understand and pass around. For [Zotero](#)<sup>[5]</sup>, it's “like iTunes for your references and research”; for Omeka, think “[WordPress](#)<sup>[6]</sup> for your exhibits and collections.”

As with Zotero, Omeka grew organically out of a strong need that we identified at CHNM over the last decade, as we built a series of projects that presented, and in some cases collected, historical artifacts. Projects such as the [September 11 Digital Archive](#)<sup>[7]</sup> and associated work with institutions such as the [Smithsonian](#)<sup>[8]</sup> and the [Library of Congress](#)<sup>[9]</sup> made us realize how much work—and how much money—it takes for institutions (and individuals) to mount high-quality and flexible exhibits online, and to manage the underlying collections.

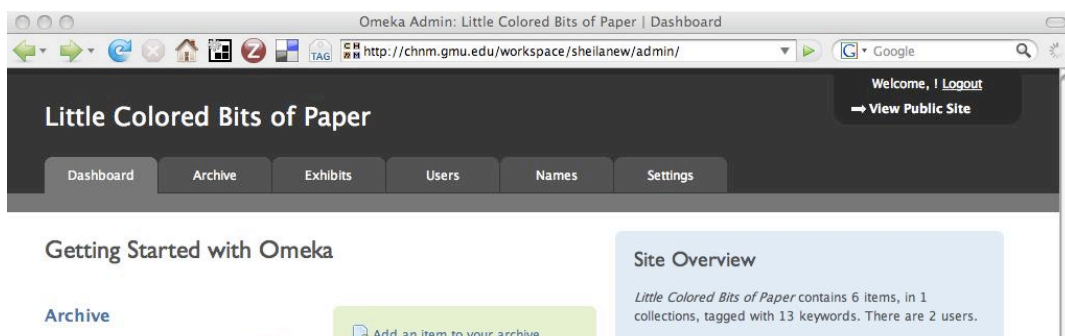
Omeka aims to simplify this entire process, save valuable resources, and

create a free and open platform that the museum and library community, and anyone else, can enrich to by developing themes and plugins. The 150 institutions already using Omeka as part of our pre-beta, ranging from the small (North Carolina's [The Light Factory](#)<sup>[10]</sup> and [Cultural & Heritage Museums](#)<sup>[11]</sup>, [River Docs exhibit](#)<sup>[12]</sup>) to the large (the [New York Public Library](#)<sup>[13]</sup>) have already responded to the ease-of-use and power of the platform.



[[River Docs exhibit](#)<sup>[14]</sup>, powered by Omeka]

Not only can Omeka provide a high-gloss front end for an exhibit, but it also provides an equally nice-looking and flexible back end that hews to critical standards (such as [Dublin Core](#)<sup>[15]</sup>). Here's a sneak peek:



Manage items in your archive: add, edit, and delete items. Learn about item types and group items into collections.

**Exhibits**  
Create and manage exhibits that display items from the archive.

**Users**  
Add and manage users of various levels: from researcher to super.

**Settings**  
Manage your general settings for the site, including title, description, and themes.

- Add a collection to group items
- Browse exhibits
- Create an exhibit
- Browse Users
- Add a User
- Edit General Settings
- Manage Themes
- Manage Plugins

**Recent Items**

Animated Animals on Stamps	11.06.2007
Fraud case--correspondence with USPS	09.05.2007
Fraud case	08.20.2007
Scott's, Jr Stamp Collecting Album	08.20.2007
Ebony Society of Philatelic Events and Reflections	08.20.2007

View All Items

Done zotero

*The Omeka start page.*

Omeka Admin: Little Colored Bits of Paper | Add Item

http://chnm.gmu.edu/workspace/sheilanev/admin/items/add

Welcome, ! Logout  
View Public Site

Little Colored Bits of Paper

Dashboard Archive Exhibits Users Names Settings

Items Types Collections Tags

Add an Item

1 STEP ONE 2 STEP TWO 3 STEP THREE

Core Metadata

Title

Subject

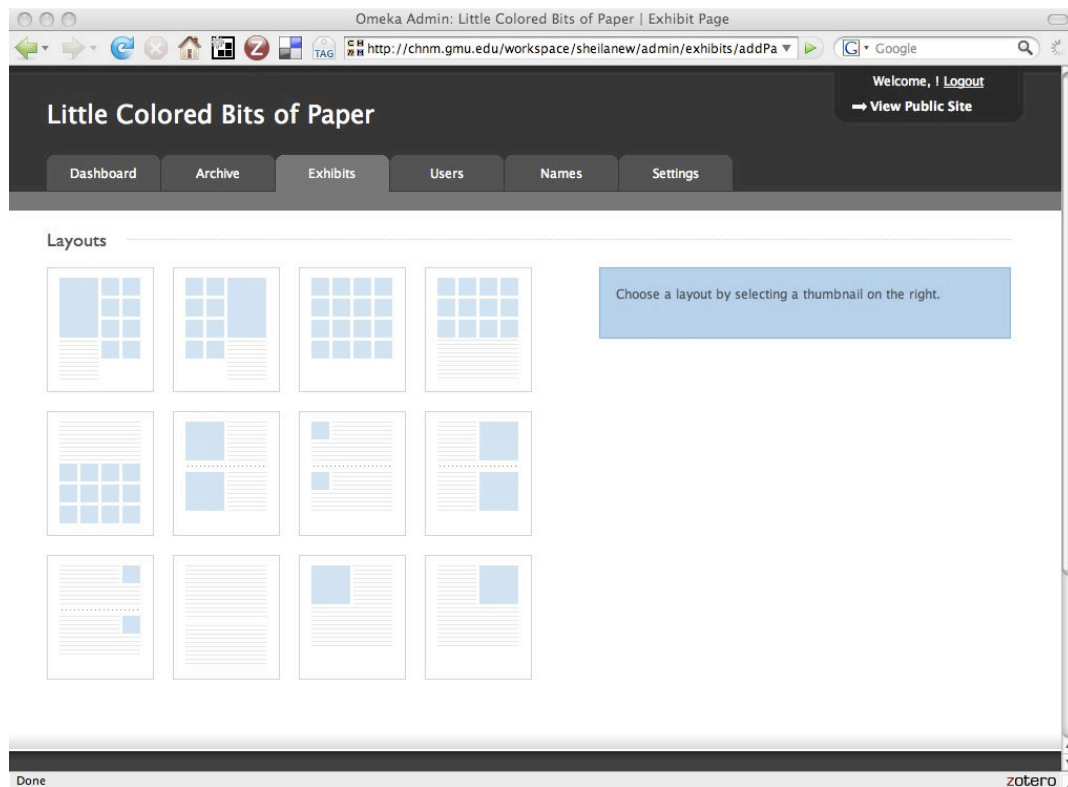
Description

Done zotero

*Adding items is a simple process, but collections conform to library and museum metadata standards, and you can also use tags.*

The theme-switching process and plugin architecture at the heart of Omeka will be familiar to users who are accustomed to working with popular blogging software, but Omeka includes a number of features that are directed specifically at academic, museum, and library use. First, the

system functions using an archive built on a rigorous metadata scheme, allowing it to be interoperable with existing content management systems and all other Omeka installations. Second, Omeka includes a process for building narrative exhibits with flexible layouts.



*The layout of your site can be changed with a single click.*

These two features alone provide cultural institutions with the power to increase their web presence and to showcase the interpretive expertise of curators, archivists, and historians. But Omeka's plugin architecture also allows users to do much more to extend their exhibits<sup>[16]</sup> to include maps, timelines, and folksonomies, and it provides the APIs (application programming interfaces) that open-source developers and designers need to add additional functionality to suit their own institutions' particular needs. In turn, a public plugins and themes directory will allow these community developers to donate their new tools back to the rest of Omeka users. The Omeka team is eager to build a large and robust community of open-source developers around this suite of technologies.

You can learn much more about Omeka on [its website](#)<sup>[17]</sup>. Credit goes to the fantastic [Omeka team](#)<sup>[18]</sup>: directors Tom Scheinfeldt and Sharon Leon; developer and manager Jeremy Boggs; manager Sheila Brennan; and developers Kris Kelly, Dave Lester, Jim Safley, and Jon Lesser.

This entry was posted on Wednesday, February 20th, 2008 at 11:42 am and is filed under [News](#)<sup>[19]</sup>, [Omeka](#)<sup>[20]</sup>. You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#)<sup>[21]</sup> feed. You can [leave a response](#)<sup>[22]</sup>, or [trackback](#)<sup>[23]</sup> from your own site.

## References

1. ^ [Center for History and New Media](#) (chnm.gmu.edu)
2. ^ [Omeka](#) (www.omeka.org)
3. ^ [Alfred P. Sloan Foundation](#) (www.sloan.org)
4. ^ [Institute of Museum and Library Services](#) (www.imls.gov)
5. ^ [Zotero](#) (www.zotero.org)
6. ^ [WordPress](#) (www.wordpress.org)
7. ^ [September 11 Digital Archive](#) (911digitalarchive.org)
8. ^ [Smithsonian](#) (www.si.edu)
9. ^ [Library of Congress](#) (www.loc.gov)
10. ^ [The Light Factory](#) (www.lightfactory.org)
11. ^ [Cultural & Heritage Museums](#) (www.chmuseums.org)
12. ^ [River Docs exhibit](#) (www.catawbariverdocs.com)
13. ^ [New York Public Library](#) (www.nypl.org)
14. ^ [River Docs exhibit](#) (www.catawbariverdocs.com)
15. ^ [Dublin Core](#) (www.dublincore.org)
16. ^ [extend their exhibits](#) (omeka.org)
17. ^ [its website](#) (www.omeka.org)
18. ^ [Omeka team](#) (omeka.org)
19. ^ [View all posts in News](#) (www.dancohen.org)
20. ^ [View all posts in Omeka](#) (www.dancohen.org)
21. ^ [RSS 2.0](#) (www.dancohen.org)
22. ^ [leave a response](#) (www.dancohen.org)

23. <sup>^</sup> [trackback \(www.dancohen.org\)](http://www.dancohen.org)

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<http://www.dancohen.org/2008/02/20/introducing-omeka/>

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READABILITY — An Arc90 Laboratory Experiment

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