



## Bamboo at heart of £423k Rhodesia Project

The University of the West of England (UWE) in collaboration with Bristol's British Empire and Commonwealth Museum has chosen Lemur's Bamboo software suite for a major digitisation project on the archives of the Rhodesian army. A £423,000 grant has been awarded for this work by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the project is expected to run over the next three years. The results will be presented at a public conference, and provide the basis for output such as papers and books.

At present the archive is sitting in hundreds of uncatalogued boxes at the Empire Museum. Researchers who have investigated the boxes have found gems such as poignant photographs of soldiers on both sides of the war for independence; intelligence reports; operational instructions, and policy debates exposing the strengths and weaknesses of a doomed but desperate government. However there is no way of locating specific documents and no organising principle behind the collection, which was saved from destruction after independence in 1980 and smuggled into South Africa.

Bamboo is designed specifically for these types of large databases on PCs or the web. It handles multimedia data including text, images, audio and video and uses a combination of relational (Boolean) retrieval with the powerful system of probabilistic (Bayesian) retrieval. Searching is very fast and intuitive and Bamboo can run on a server, allowing many users to access the data at once using standard web browsers. Commenting on their choice of software, Project leader Dr Diana Jeater, Principal Lecturer in African History in UWE's Faculty of Humanities, Languages and Social Sciences, and also Chair of the Britain Zimbabwe Society said:

"We needed a package which could handle and search across mixed media and unstructured materials, quickly and accurately, and then present findings clearly. Bamboo is excellent for this, and our data will be held in a highly compressed and efficient form and may be input and output as industry-standard XML. Lemur Consulting developed Bamboo as an efficient and flexible tool for humanities computing, they have a proven track record with sustainable software, their costs are competitive and their

provision of support is consonant with an academic project."



Dr Diana Jeater, Project Leader

Also referring to Bamboo, Research Fellow Tim Lovering, who is a military historian and trained archivist, commented:

"The ability to make unexpected associations and connections in our data will be an immensely valuable tool for users researching the collection. Crucially, Bamboo allows a search query to be any shape or pattern of words. This flexibility, combined with the chances of Bamboo finding a range of records relating to the same theme, will greatly expand the potential for users to make new discoveries which will enable them to apply the material in innovative ways."

## Open Source Benefits

Open Source software has become commonplace in some sectors of the IT industry, but concerns are often voiced about a perceived lack of integration, support or readiness for enterprise level performance demands. We believe that these concerns can be fully addressed by carefully choosing from the vast array of open source software and suppliers available.

One of the biggest benefits of Open Source software is that development and support for a piece of software can be provided by any vendor, not just the original developer of the software. This results in a competitive marketplace and a lack of vendor lock-in, benefiting the customer.

Open Source solutions are also a great deal more transparent to the customer; there is no "black box" hiding the workings of the system, so the performance characteristics of a system can be fully detailed.

All worthwhile Open Source technologies are supported by many companies, who will happily address issues of integration and support on regular commercial terms.

In fact, there are so many advantages for customers with Open Source software, that the most immediately obvious benefit - the lack of licensing costs - is often almost overlooked!

## British Computer Society

The British Computer Society meeting in London on 21<sup>st</sup> November will take a look at Open Source software and Information Retrieval. These two specialist groups will be addressed by Lemur's Richard Boulton, who will focus on the Xpian search engine system used by Lemur in many of its consulting projects.

Lemur supports and contributes to several open source projects. We look forward to this opportunity to introduce Xpian to a wider audience, and to discuss the challenges and rewards inherent in applying Open Source software in commercial situations.

For more details, see <http://ossg.bcs.org/2006/11/21/>

### About Lemur

Lemur offers expert systems advice and customised information retrieval software. As search engine specialists, we can:

- Provide your website or intranet with a high performance search engine
- Offer multimedia database solutions with probabilistic search and XML editing facilities
- Produce information retrieval software for specific purposes; such as building tools that will display data in graphical form, or sort documents automatically.

Lemur also provides general expertise and development in technologies such as Java, C++, Linux, Windows and XML. "We promise to explain ourselves in a clear and jargon free manner, giving you accurate and honest advice."