

# Department for Environment and Heritage



## User Friendly Living Collections Management Software

- Identify and examine Interface and database design
- Look at specific tools and methodologies to deliver LC's
- Make the LC software a success

## What is an Interface?

- The basic visual elements allowing a user to operate and interact with a program
- Can be Windows based e.g. such as Microsoft word, web based e.g Google Maps or Command Line such as DOS
- Many I.T. organisations have interface design standards

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## What is an LC Database?

- Underlying technology used to store information about your living collections
- Can be desktop based for example Microsoft Access or Enterprise level for example MySQL or Oracle.
- The database is interrogated by a user via the interface.
- **Often the type of database being used is transparent to the user – they're probably not that interested!**

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## Choosing the right tools

- H/M people need to access your LC's (# of licenses)
- Where are the users that need access?
- Price!! Range from free open-source right through to 1,000's and 1000's of \$\$\$
- I.T. and programming skills available to update and maintain LC's
- Long-term support and direction of your chosen tools

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## Common features of LC Interfaces

- Input information – add new plants, create accessions, update plant health etc.
- Find information – based on accession numbers, plant names, bed names, iconic collections etc.
- Help - There's no such thing as too intuitive
- Exporting data. It's no good not being able to take LC's data away.

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## Interface design principals

- Know your user!
  - **Needs and goals**
    - *Special professional jargon*
- Emulate a familiar system
- Use consistency both in look and operation
- Nobody loves an ugly interface

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## Interface design process

- **User Analysis**
  - *Understand what the users will do with the system*
- **System prototyping**
  - *Develop a series of prototypes for experiment*
- **Interface evaluation**
  - *Experiment prototypes with users*

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## Information presentation

- Search results – precise but show relationships where they exist e.g. Name of plant with the Family relationship
- Can information be 'downloaded' / exported from the system. Is some information restricted?
- Use of colour can improve interp. results

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## Error messages

- Poor error messages can mean that a user rejects rather than accepts a system
- Messages should be polite, concise, consistent and constructive
- Consider using error numbers as part of the message to help tech support.

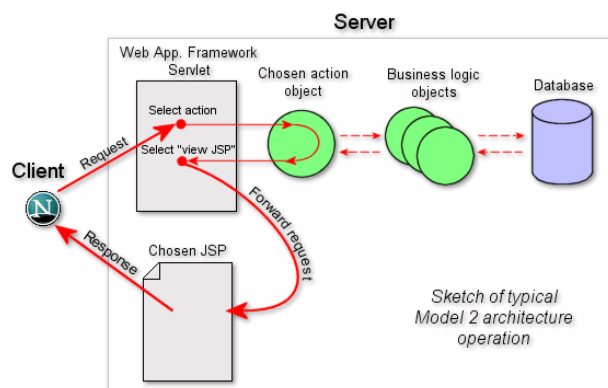
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# Designing the database

- What type of database – Relational, Hierarchical etc.
- Tables and their structure will depend on what you want to keep as part of LC's (ITF)
- Normalize the database – don't want to have to enter data more than once.

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# Linking the database to the Interface



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# Why limit yourself to just 1 interface?

## Multiple interfaces

- A single interface often fails when it tries to be all things to all people
- Create a separate interface for staff, Friends, the general public
  - *More time and cost inhibitive but in the long run much easier to maintain and upgrade*
  - *Much more secure – for e.g. absolutely no possibility for public to write to the database. The interface does not support it*

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## Summing up

### Choosing a Friendly Living Collections Management Software

- Initial consultation with all groups and users to find their needs.
- Identify the Interface and database design
- Identify what specific tools and methodologies you will use to deliver LC's
- Make sure you control the choice of LC software
- Ensure The software will fit the identified needs
- When this is done you will feel confident in producing the ultimate brief to select your provider

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