Software Forecast 2.0
What Genealogists Need for the Future

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A Quick Recap...

Since last year’s RootsTech conference we have seen a few new developments combining genealogy and technology. While many of the items on the "wish list" are still forthcoming, a few key factors remain:

1. Many genealogists remain at a crossroads between available tools and the ability to integrate emerging technologies into daily practice.

2. The community needs software that bridges elements of cloud computing, social networking, and the next generation of web-based technologies with established principles of genealogical research and methodologies in order to harness emerging technologies for genealogy and family history users.

3. With new players entering the genealogical field as content and software providers, the need for companies to differentiate themselves from others will help to propel innovation and help move our forecast forward.

A few key additions to the field over the past year have answered, at least in part, some of our needs:

1. 1000Memories <http://www.1000memories.com> provides a clear way to capture, tag, and store content applicable to living individuals while implementing the basic principles behind social networking.

2. Recent software releases, such as RootsMagic 5.0 <http://www.rootsmagic.com> have begun to integrate timelines and other factors within the user experience.

3. Developments at JSTOR’s mobile page <http://mobile.jstor.org> demonstrate that historically rich and complex data can be viewed and transferred through mobile devices within a simple mobile app.

5. The creation of Google+ provided an additional social outreach for genealogists that, due to its ability to interact with Google’s other products could become a powerful new way of searching for genealogists.

6. Mocavo’s growth <http://mocavo.com> as a search engine for genealogists provides further integration between users and online content.

7. The release of mobile apps by FindMyPast.co.uk, Ancestry.com, the Federation of Genealogical Societies (FGS), and other organizations illustrates the acceptance of mobile platforms for interacting with genealogists.

Broad Approaches

1. A standardized metadata set for genealogists, encompassing the traditional GEDCOM format with existing resources such as digital images, and wiki technology. The need for all vendors offering services to the genealogical community, especially content providers, to adopt this standard is essential to create the next generation of genealogical software.

2. The creation of a universal metadata structure for digital images, particularly key records used by genealogists across multiple content providers (such as census, vital records, etc.)

3. Family history software that is open source, allowing for a wider-array of improvement and enhancements for users. Developing the next generation of genealogical software within a “peer-community” will offer the greatest benefits for the end-user, and allow for the maximum amount of flexibility and integration with emerging technologies.

4. Dedicated cloud-based storage services for genealogists that allow for collaboration and immediate digital preservation of content, lineages, research materials, and other data.

5. Comprehensive geocoding for genealogical content and personal data, documenting both current and historical locations within the digital resources we encounter.

Narrow Approaches

1. Mobile and tablet solutions for emerging genealogists to access and tag key genealogical content (such as census records).

2. Scanning, storage, and access solutions for user-owned data pertinent to a large community and/or group not accessible online or in a repository.
3. Built-in voice recognition to assist in entering research notes and recording genealogical data within the software program. This feature would encourage younger generations to interact with genealogical data, and also allow for an easier method for genealogists to record and preserve oral history.

4. A higher level of integration with online library catalogs (OPAC) systems, allowing genealogists to easily prepare for research trips and record sources already examined.

5. Mobile versions of software programs that appeal to a younger, “tech-savvy” audience, while supporting the most important elements of their desktop versions.

6. The addition of historical context (including political, social, and religious movements) in a timeline form would benefit users, while also providing a resource and potential link to other user groups.

Next Steps

1. An open discussion between key stakeholders, including users (of all levels), content providers (both commercial and non-profit), and technology professionals working towards the establishment of a new uniform standard for transferring and sharing genealogical data and a framework for future discussions.

2. Further research into the behaviors of genealogists when using technology. **An understanding of actual versus perceived use is essential to developers creating software for genealogists.**

3. The creation of an online community for technology providers seeking to serve genealogists. A community geared towards the discussion of developments in software, potential future ideas, and the development of software certification standards.

4. The community-based creation of suitable best practices for genealogist engaging in social networking.

5. The creation of a community-approved standard for sharing and storing data using cloud-computing services, in order to allow for developers to build appropriate tools for genealogists.

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