CMS REVIEW

Recollect Content-Management-System



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RECOLLECT

Archive-management systems have long struggled to bridge the divide between high-quality metadata and easy-to-access digital surrogates. The latter often appears to be an afterthought. Axiell CALM, for instance, enables users to easily navigate the archival hierarchy, while images display as underwhelming thumbnails. The questions this review aims to answer are: Does the Recollect Collection Management System (CMS) close the gap, and if so, does it support archives in better meeting the needs of users?

Recollect CMS was launched by New Zealand Micrographic Services (NZMS) in 2015. Three years later, it split from NZMS to form a separate legal entity.[1] The system is marketed as supporting organisations to "manage, preserve, and showcase" their archive by helping you, as their customer, to "consolidate your archive's management software, streamline your patrons' self-service, and provide unrivalled online access to your collections."[2] The cloud-based system is targeted at cultural-heritage organisations, with pages on their website dedicated to academic institutions, archives and public libraries.

Recollect logo.

SELECTION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Over the past five years, I have helped implement Recollect CMS at Tauranga City Libraries and Rotorua Library, Te Aka Mauri. I was fortunate to lead the project from beginning to end at Rotorua, working through selection, implementation and launch, with the support of my incredible team. A scoping report was our point of departure, in which we compared six systems: Recollect CMS; Vernon CMS; Extensis Portfolio; Collections MOSAiC; Axiell CALM; ContentDM. Each system was scored against our project objectives:

1. To design a site that meets user's needs and engenders confidence.

2. To comply with Te Aka Mauri standards and procedures, and wider ethical/legal frameworks.

3. To collect content from the community: asset uploads, short descriptions, longer stories.

4. To manage our collections: the opportunity to incorporate archival-management processes like accessioning, reporting and bulk updates.

5. To preserve our digital collections.

6. To share our collections/resources through high-quality cataloguing and digitisation.

7. To share knowledge held within our collections/resources through engagement with the community: seamlessly sharing audio and video content and pulling together content in exciting ways to tell stories.

Unsurprisingly, every product scored well in the areas of compliance, collections management and cataloguing. The team found that Vernon CMS and ContentDM also ticked the first box. Both user interfaces were easy to use and looked professional. Recollect CMS was the only product to shine in other areas. We were impressed by its focus on linked data, storytelling and community engagement. Kete Rotorua – one of many examples of the Kete community-repository software supported by the National Library of New Zealand – had been a huge success in our community, until it reached the end of its life. Based on the findings of our report, we felt confident Recollect would support collections management and community engagement.

DID THE REALITY LIVE UP TO THE EXPECTATION?

Stepping out of the standards-driven world of Axiell CALM into the build-your-own-templates realm of Recollect was intimidating. I discovered the driving force behind Recollect's implementation process was meeting user needs through a bespoke site. The customer-centric approach was refreshing, but at odds with the description-orientated part of my professional self. I was confronted by an array of archival concerns! What if our metadata templates did not meet standards? How would we make our metadata interoperable? Would in-house guidelines ensure consistency and discoverability?

The good news is that, once I conquered my fears, the benefits of Recollect's flexibility outweighed the rigidity of other systems. At both libraries, we came to realise the key was investing time in creating the template structures and related metadata guidelines. The analogy being: a house is only as good as its foundations. Once these were established, and external standards integrated, we had the freedom to introduce in-house fields that would be of huge benefit to our community. For example, incorporating the Waka Hourua model[3] developed by Tauranga City Libraries colleagues, Elisha

Rolleston and Harley Couper.

Meanwhile, Recollect seamlessly delivered in other areas. User-experience testing revealed customers loved the interface, especially engaging with our digital surrogates. The storytelling aspects have proven to be the most popular feature at Rotorua Library. Every quarter, we launch an on-site touchscreen display and share a related story on our Recollect site, *Pakiaka*. These pages are our most viewed, along with items showcased via social media. The team works hard to align posts with local events, such as anniversaries and celebrations. We are now exploring the possibilities of linked data through authority-like pages for people, places and organisations.

IS IT POSSIBLE TO HAVE THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS? HIGH QUALITY METADATA AND A GREAT USER EXPERIENCE.

Yes, if you truly invest in the implementation process. Creating metadata templates is fiddly. There is a good chance you will learn as you go (this is code for "you will make mistakes"!). Getting to grips with the parent/child functionality, to link levels of archival description, is also a challenge. That being said, the friendly Recollect team is always there to help.

A final thought. While working on these implementation projects, I came to appreciate being challenged by a different perspective. That is, focusing on the full spectrum of users, rather than archivists alone. Having supported customers in navigating other content-management systems, the risks of prioritising back-end users are obvious. I will never forget a researcher telling me how they had learnt the theories behind archival arrangement to better navigate an online catalogue. Removing this layer of mystique can only be a positive thing.

ENDNOTES

1. Recollect CMS, 'Recollect Spins out of NZMS', 2019, available at www.recollectcms.com/recollect-spins-out-of-nzms, accessed 23 June 2025.
2. Recollect CMS, 'Recollect for Archives', undated, available at www.recollectcms.com/archive, accessed 23 June 2025.
3. Elisha Rollestion and Harley Couper, 'Waka Hourua, a model', 2021, available at paekoroki.tauranga.govt.nz/nodes/view/53930, accessed 23 June 2025.