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Open Source for Education

Literary Machine: What can Open Source learn from a Failed Commercial Program?
The literary Machine™ advertises itself as a tool for:
anyone who writes, anyone who must think critically and creatively, anyone who composes and produces documents, anyone who sorts and analyzes information…Source:http://www.sommestad.com/lm.htmThe Literary Machine™ developers believe that…Teachers and Students
Scientists and Researchers
Lawyers
Writers and Novelists
Business Executives and Personnel Manager
Just about any Thinker…needs their software.
Well, maybe they do, or maybe they don't.
So, why don't teachers everywhere refer this program to their district's IT department for testing? Why don't teachers test this program themselves?
Answer: This program is not ready for prime time. And, Open Source advocates need to take a look at the lessons that this program teaches about the "fitness of software for the educational arena."First, the Reviews!First impressions of the software are damaged because the Literary Machine™ Website uses arcane and obsolete frames. Besides the Website contains broken links. Worse, the software sales site does not even have its own domain name. And anyone can get a domain name for less than $10.00 USD.SidebarIf you want to know just how easy and inexpensive it is to acquire a domain name, check out Go-Daddy.Com Domain Names…
"LiteraryMachine.com is already taken, but LiteraryMachine.Info is available for only $0.99 USD for the first year.Not having a Website to look professional is an unconscionable business faux pas.
And having a sloppy Website is inexcusable, particularly when you can automatically install an Open Source Web site without cost at any Web host. For example:
Go-dadd.Com and HostGator.Com offer Website hosting for under $4.00 per month (Go-daddy) and under $8.00 per month (HostGator)

And Both of these hosting sites offer free Open Source Web Software and "one-click" installation.This means that their is no excuse for offering a sub-standard presence like Literary Machine does.But, here are reviewer comments:
"Difficult to say whether LM is worthwhile - Difficult is the word""The website this comes from gave me a trojan. Download3, or something, OR perhaps it was that I just downloaded this? I'm blaming the website. Still, I don't trust it now. ""Pros: Couldn't figure out how to even begin using this program. Since trying out menu selections doesn't really provide any enlightenment and it didn't play nice hooking with Internet Explorer when trying to go to view the tutorials, I still have no clue how to use it. I guess all this should have been in the cons section.
Cons: I hate to rip on a free program, but this sure looked like it was quite the effort so I hope my criticism is constructive - it is meant to be. There has to be some set of relatively easy to find programming standards that tell what a user expects when selecting a text box menu item, etc. so if the programmer(s) can make it more consistent and intuitive to the average user, its supposed power and value might come shining through. Until that happens, I suspect most will try and give up on this program as I have."Difficult to use. Application needed is hard to uninstall...""I am reasonably computer literate but I found this program impossible to figure out. I played with it for over an hour and finally decided that I could not fine any use for it at all. While I hate to knock freeware I suggest that you save your time on this one and don't download. ""During installation, the program requires you to install an application called Borland Database Engine. This application is not the greatest because it 'difficult' to remove. I managed to remove it thank to this site: "worldwideweb.stsi.com/lurk20005.htm". Unless you must; it would be best to pass on this program... (Unless you don't mind 'things' being installed on your computer!)""Non-intuitive software makes work a nightmare""Pros: Well, it would have been free, if I could've gotten it to work.Cons: I am very much disappointed with the handling of this product. While it promises much (and may even deliver at some point), it's next to impossible to figure out how the thing even works. While it?s far from intuitive, I had hope in the mention of tutorials, but even these were not well handled.The very first link returned a 404 error (page does not exist). Not an auspicious beginning.In the help file is a link for an 'introductory animated tutorial.' This loads a browser window showing 'Error loading viewlet' and a pretty blank screen.When I finally found a link that worked, I was greeted with the message that this version is no longer supported, and that the tutorial and help pages had been taken offline. However, tutorials are still promised, in the form of Flash and PDF file downloads, at a cost of $8 or $20 (At this point I'm no longer interested in finding out what the difference is.)I have it open on my desktop, to check facts as I type, but as soon as I post this review, the Literary Machine is coming OFF of my machine."

Source:Download.ComLike other reviewers, Classroom Toolkit regrets publishing negative reviews. But, our purpose in reviewing the Literary Machine is to show exactly what issues affect Open Source software when teachers or students (or both) ask the district's IT Department to load the "free software.""No Free Lunch:" Corollary - Nothing is "Free!"Take notice of every one of the issues presented by the Literary Machine reviewers… Incompatibility
Non-standard installation
Uninstall difficulty
Support
Inadequate tutorials
Obscure database engine
Etc.Notice that price is not on the list of issues. But, wasting time with a "free program" is on the list.
But, look at what the Literary Machine developers provide as "fixes and problem solving solutions for installing the "free"software…
Note: Classroom Toolkit was not able to provide a direct link to this information because of the "frames" design of the Literary Machine Website. We have included a link that allows you to skip over these error messages. Select this link to skip this section of the review...
"Errors and FixesImportant Notice: Windows XP with Servicepack 2Some older LM2000 and LM Professional installer programs will not function on Windows XP machines with Servicepack 2 installed. Replacements exist since Dec 2004. Link to the Win XP SP2-adapted package:Win XP SP2 LM2000 installation file for Windows XP Servicepack 2----------This page has three parts.At the top you'll find an opening summary of the most important information. We recommend that all users read it, especially if you do not have the latest version of LM 2000. The second part is a detailed account of all the important fixes made since the initial release of LM 2000 version 1.0 (1.051) on 22 October 2000. The latest version of the text document this section comes from is available at http://www.sommestad.com/dnl/LM_Program_Fixes.txt. It closes with a summary of LM's limits (e.g., size limits of items, projects, and so forth).----------Summary"Portable folder installations": The problem: If you have another BDE program running, the "portable folder" LM installation will report "Borland Database Engine (BDE) not found". Solution: Execute the file uninstall_local_BDE.bat to remove the BDE files in the LM program folder . (A requirement is that you already have a BDE installation (notified in the Windows Registry) in the machine.)Outlines: Double clicking a line (project) in an outline saves the outline and opens a new outline build with the clicked project as name. This is a potent command, but it might be executed by mistake. Reload the previous outline if needed. (This function has been made optional in LM Pro).Important installation issue: The Paradox database system (version 5) will not allow filenames with path included to be longer than 79 characters. Example: D:\Program Files\Sommestad\The Literary Machine 2000\project.db If you install somewhere else than in the suggested D:\Program Files\Sommestad\, keep it short. Warning message in version 1.128B and upwards.Merge Words: Merge Words in the Concept Window will only function for a pair of words, not for three or more.Windows 95 problems with late 1.1 versions: Windows 95 installations may have general resource problems with version 1.1, probably due to the increased complexity in the program. In the final 1.1 version it will be possible to set the maximum number of text items on screen to 30 - 200. The lower limit could be necessary for Windows-95.Return from external sessions, like editing files, sometimes requires a click on taskbar.DOS-jobs (backup and restore) must be manually deleted from taskbar (Windows 95/98).DOS jobs time-scheduled and may take a long time to complete. Workaround: Let the timeout message stay on screen until you can see that all work in the command window is done.Desktop map repaints with delay only. (Intentional to save resources, pls click update.)WordPerfect will not work as standard word processor (as helper text editor) within LM. Two things can cause problems with invoking other programs from LM: Long file names. May cause troubles with system modules that have been migrated to the system from 16-bit systems. This is solved here (like in other systems) with the "8.3" short filename convention. (= Short names with " ~ " in them).
The application will not conform to the scheme: Run: EXEAPPNAME filename. That is, it will not take upstart file name as 1st parameter on the command line. This is the WordPerfect case. WP starts a dialogue which disturbs LM. (This is a "shell"-type and not an OLE-connection).Tips: To find out if a word processor will work within LM, do this test: Make a shortcut to the word processor exe file. Drag and drop a text file on it (Like ReadMe.txt). If it works, and works without any upcoming "Do you really want to.." dialog box, LM will take it. Copy the path and filename from "Properties" of the shortcut and insert into the LM.ini file. Example:TextEditor = C:\Program Files\Microsoft Office\Office\WINWORD.EXEAdvanced auto start options with LM (auto start in minimized position) or (accidentally) double-clicking the start icon one extra time may case errors (like "referenced memory at...") Escape via "Cancel" or "Ok" and start again.
Reinstalling (or version refresh of) Corel products (WordPerfect) may require reinstall of LM. (1 reported case).The PdxRbld freeware for packing tables may require a BDE-version setting in the ini-file. See PdxRbld documentation in Readme.rtfThe sub-application "Wordboiler" displays its window in the "always on top manner". However, this may be disturbed if other applications also use "on-top". If the Wordboiler disappears, look for it behind the LM main window. (You can place it alongside the main application window.)Help file generally not accepted by users. Minor revision with version 1.112 lm.exe package and with 1.117 (Separate download file). See Release notes for any extra info needed.Repaint of text item corners (color) may temporarily fail.XML-import comparatively slow.No pack of database within system. (See "Database maintenance" page).URL capture insufficient as to length and unusual characters

used.Bugs in project handling and start-up of documents/web-pages were corrected in version 1.118D.Character set adaptations (See "Adapt to other language" page).Paradox database system (BDEADMIN.exe) must not be configured for multi-user access. If you get growing *.lck files somewhere on your disks during execution run the BDEADMIN.exe database setup program and set LOCAL SHARE to false. (Select Configuration/System/Init).The warning for .lck files and the suggestion to set LOCAL SHARE = FALSE in BDEADMIN.exe may reappear too often. Fixed in 1.121B. SHAREMODEWARNING=0 suppresses the warning. (However, it is not to recommended to allow LOCAL Share = TRUE)The "Large Font" setting in Windows is not recommended - some dialog windows become distorted.There are irregularities in the automatic saving of "excluded words" in the Wordboiler. Users should manually load and save "exclude words" if they are used.----------Program Fixes (Details)GUNNAR SOMMESTADTHE LITERARY MACHINEDec 14, 2001----------IMPORTANT FIXES in versions later than 1.051 (= Oct 22, 2000)----------Unhooking a project from a new item can remove a keyword also: FIXED (1.129)Find command: (FIXED 1.127)When using a search string with a blank (=several words), the command misses some occurrences. The search is performed on one line at a time in the text window - missing those items where the two words were split on two lines.1) URL:s stored in the project "box" may fail if they contain arguments separated by commas or other unusual constructs. FIX: Comma separation case fixed; else the problem remains. Length = 80 chars; will not be changed, since it is defined in the database. Same applies to title length (38 chars)2) FIXED: Book Width in .ini-file not in effect.3) FIXED: Project box; "Execute on file extension" could fail if the filename contains blanks.4) Behavior of "flyword" dropped on item changed: No longer supports direct keyword update. WORKAROUND: Drop Flyword in dictionary, then drop the selected word directly onto the item.5) FlyWord by DoubleClick option in .ini-file not ok. FIXED. 6) FIXED: New items did not have correct "text side-up" mode set; the new right button menu on single words would not function.7) Insert new word with testing; must find both Dict and Inflec entries. FIXED. Menu selection Edit/Copy (to get word in table); apply also to inflection window. FIXED.9) Concatenation of very long texts unchecked in memory. FIXED, concatenated texts limited to 250 000 characters.10) Minor memory leakage (connected to big clipboard copies). FIXED.11) Inflection" data that was saved to a zip-file was not included in a subsequent restore operation. FIXED. [1.113E]12) The Paradox database system (version 5) will not allow filenames with path included to be longer than 79 characters. Example: D:\Program Files\Sommestad\The Literary Machine 2000\project.db If you install somewhere else than in the suggested D:\Program Files\Sommestad\, keep it short. Warning message inserted in version 1.128EDATABASE - comments and hints:a) Utility menu: See new entry "Find damaged items"b) Compress the data base: Use a freeware like Roman Krejcis program Pdxrbld: http://www.betbyte.com/PDX.HTM (Information in help file about rebuild on restore not correct.)c) Change character set: The instructions found in Online Help/Help Center still applies. Complicated, but reported to work (Hungary, Norway, etc)KNOWN PROBLEMS:- Outline subsystem: (1) When deleting a project, the corresponding tree node in an outline tree showing will not disappear automatically. Workaround: Save this outline and reload it.(2)When using the Unhook command to delete a tree node, this node will be placed at bottom. However, if the node is a branch in the tree, the subnodes will not show up .Workaround: Save this outline and reload it.2) fixed in 1.127.- Windows-95 installations will often get problems with resources. Probably the 1.1 version of the program has grown too big for Windows-95. A setting in the INI file can help: Set MachineIndex = 50 for small Windows-95 machines and set it high (max 200) for modern machines. (Equals maximum number of items on screen.) The program has been modified in ways that often will make it exit very quick on serious problems, in order to prevent damage.- Return from external sessions, like editing the ini-file requires click on taskbar.- DOS-jobs (backup) must be manually deleted from taskbar (win95/98).- DOS jobs time-scheduled and may take a long time to complete. WORKAROUND: Let the timeout message stay on screen until you can see that all work in the command window is done.- Wordperfect will not work as standard word processor within LM.The problems with invoking other programs from LM are: Long file names. May cause troubles with system modules that has been migrated to the system from 16-bit systems. This is solved here (like in other systems) with the "8.3" short filename convention. (= Short names with " ~ " in them). The app will not conform to the scheme: Run: EXEAPPNAME filename that is it will not take the upstart file name as 1st parameter on the command line. This is the WP case. WP starts a dialogue which disturbs LM. (This is a "shell"-type and not an OLE-connection). Tips: Make a shortcut to the word processor exe file. Drag and drop a text file on it (Like ReadMe.txt). If it works, and works without any upcoming "Do you really want to.." ,LM will take it. Copy the shortcut path and filename from "Properties" of the shortcut and insert into the LM.ini file. Example: TextEditor = C:\Program Files\Microsoft Office\Office\WINWORD.EXE- Desktop map repaints with delay only. (Intentional to save resources, pls click update.)- Advanced auto start options with LM (auto start in minimized position) or (accidentally) double-clicking the start icon one extra time may case errors (like "referenced memory at..."). Escape via "Cancel" or "Ok" and start again. Also notice that the LM icon is removed a few seconds before it is actually terminated. Do not restart too soon; else you will either gracefully land in the current session or create the abovementioned conflict.

- Reinstalling (or version refresh of) Corel products (WordPerfect) may require reinstall of LM. (1 reported case).- The warning for .lck files and the suggestion to set LOCAL SHARE = FALSE in BDEADMIN.exe may reappear too often. Fixed in 1.121B. Also: SHAREMODEWARNING=0 suppresses the warning.- The PdxRbld freeware for packing tables may require a BDE-version setting in the ini-file. See PdxRbld documentation in Readme.rtf- The sub-application "Wordboiler" displays its window in the "always on top manner". However, this may be disturbed if other applications also use "on-top". If the Wordboiler disappears, look for it behind the LM main window. (You can place it alongside the

main application window.)- Marked/highlighted string in an item in connection with a find text will show first embedded occurrence - even if an exact search was performed. (Look further down if needed.)- Repaint of text item corners (color) may temporarily fail.- XML-import comparatively slow.- No pack of database within system. (See suggestion abot software on Help Center page).- URL capture insufficient as to length and unusual characters used.- Bugs in project handling and start-up of documents/web-pages were corrected in version 1.18D.- Character set adaptions - (See discussion on Help Center page).- Paradox database system (BDEADMIN.exe) must not be configured for multi-user access. If you get growing *.lck files somewhere on your disks during execution - run the BDEADMIN.exe database setup program and set LOCAL SHARE to false. (Select Configuration/System/Init).- The installation menu contains the item "Windows 95"; to be checked for such installations in order to get "drops" on the extended desktop right. However, these functions appears to be somewhat instable, you might have to checkmark "Windows 95" also for Windows 2000 installations.- The "Large Font" setting in Windows is not recommended - some dialog windows become distorted.----------LimitsMaximum size for text displayed in windows is 32000 characters. Generally, the maximum size for text displayed in other types of LM windows is a bit higher — it is a resource question. Anyway, we do not recommend longer texts than 32000 characters anywhere in an editable window.Maximum size of a concatenated text (like a project text stream or a bookmode-stream) is 250,000 characters.There is no limit on the size of text or HTML output from the Outliner, since this data is written to a file.Words (and thus Concepts) must not be longer then 38 characters. The same limit applies to Project names. URL: s (or file paths) in the projects box may be 80 characters long.Some URLs with complicated encoded strings or untypical characters are not supported, however those with commas at the end may work depending on a special fix. It remains that 80 characters will in many cases not suffice for URL capture. Since this is database-bound in LM, improvements will not come soon.When LM encounters a long filename and path, as a first resort it tries to shorten the file reference by using the "8.3" short filename convention. (These are shortened names with tilde [~] in them to replace the omitted characters.)The maximum number of entries in concept boxes or keyword/project lists in an item is set to 24.The maximum number of open windows is determined by your MachineIndex setting. By default it is set to about 80. Depending on your computer's memory situation, this limit may be too low, or in extreme cases, too high. If you get error messages like "cannot open window," they indicate that Windows has been severely strained. Try to avoid opening too many objects. The LM system tries to protect data in all such situations, but texts or keywords may be blanked out at such failures.The program was developed and compiled on a Windows 95 / 32 Mby / 133 MHz machine. Windows 95 machines need a setting Windows-95 in the menu Installation. This fixes a peculiarity in Delphi/Windows treatment of window control positioning. Windows 95/98 does not close DOS jobs (such as zipping and unzipping backups during back-up and restore operations). Sooner or later, you must close them on the Windows Task Bar. Other differences between Windows 95/98, NT, 2000 or ME have not been reported. (Windows 2000 is by far the best choice of system.)There is no rollback facility (i.e., the ability to undo changes step by step or to restore the state of a previous point in time). Even if you know how to handle a Paradox database, it is preferable to rely on back-ups if there are data base damages.Be aware of how great a demand you put on resources when loading big pictures or very long texts into LM. Be cautious by updating the database first and closing unnecessary windows. There are number of checks and limits encoded in the program, but they could fail in some cases. Use the backup function frequently. Your valuable work must be protected against various technical risks not all being inside the LM program itself."A Tale of Obsolete WoeThe software has both a freeware (LM2007) and a commercial version (Literary Machine Pro). However, if you look at the dates on the error messages, you can see that the progrma was developed sometime over a decade ago.

So, who wants a great idea that was not developed correctly, was difficult to install and use, and more difficult to uninstall.

Who wants to waste time with software, even if it is free. And, what teacher has time to waste?

So, a teacher that refers a free program that is more trouble than it is worth to the district IT Department will loose credibility. And, IT Department staff, if they have time to tinker with the program, will make jokes about that teacher for years to come.

So, do your homework before making requests of the IT Department that will waste their time.

Do your homework, and when great and useful Open Source products that meet the instructional needs of your students become available, you will have a clean reputation with the folks that matter most"your friendly, helpful, hardworking IT Department staff members.

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