

Utilize Information Technology for the Management of Buddhist Temples

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In Sri Lanka, Buddhism is considered to be the major core of the culture because it refreshes the human mind, making it kinder and smoother. The temple is one of the main sources of Buddhism in the village/city, which connects people. In a village/city, temple is the main source to implement various religious and cultural activities. Therefore, monks in a temple must conduct many activities aimed at people, various government and non government bodies, not only in Sri Lanka but also in foreign countries. In modern fast moving world, it is required to make aware of all the people in an effective manner about religious and cultural activities. In addition, money is a pressing need for every activity organized and it is essential to keep records about expenditures, especially how money was utilized. Therefore, it is essential to have a good mechanism of management in temples. Otherwise, people might keep away from the temple.

Today Information Technology plays a huge role in information management activities. We can easily adopt information Technological tools in managing temples in many cases of day to day activities. In this paper, the facts that how information Technology in managing temples can be utilized

is brought into discussion & also the ways of increasing the efficiency of day to day activities are suggested (6).

Information Technological tools that can be used in managing temples

Mainly we can identify two types of tools that are commercially & freely available very useful for day today management activities in a temple. They are;

1. Office and office supporting software.
2. Offline and Online Temple Management information Systems.

Office software

In Office software two types of software can be found, mainly freeware and commercial software (3). It is better to use free office suit like open office (2) (Fig 01). Because such office system has numerous advantages such as,

1. Free to download, install and re - distribute.
2. More resistance to malware.
3. Free to download and use add-ins, templates...etc.
4. Files can be saved and opened in various other formats like pdf, doc (Microsoft Word)...etc.
5. User interface is very similar to commercial software interface.



Fig 01

Such office system benefits much to a temple. MailMerge is a good example. By using the MailMerge, user can produce many letters, email...etc with different addresses, names... etc. Such mail merge can be done within several steps (Fig 02).

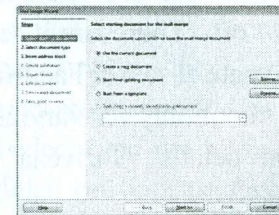
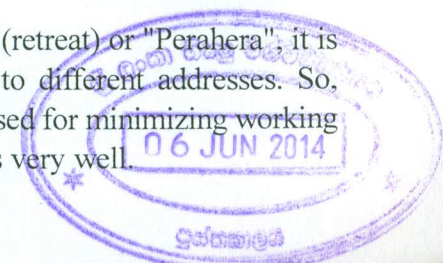


Fig 02

These steps involve;

- Select document type
- Insert Address
- Create Salutation
- Adjust Layout
- Edit and Personalize Document and
- Print

In a ceremony like "Was Dana"(retreat) or "Perahera", it is required to send the same letter to different addresses. So, facilities like Mail Merge can be used for minimizing working load and managing such occasions very well.



In addition, spreadsheet software like open office Calc can be used to various mathematical and accounting purposes (Fig 03).

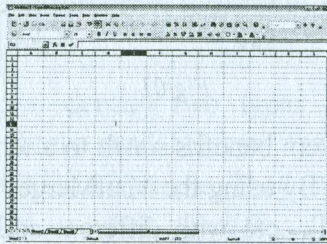


Fig 03

Such System equipped with many functions in accounting, mathematics and so on. Therefore, it can be used for accounting and mathematical tasks. Facilities in spreadsheet software can be used to not only for various calculations, but also to keep account details, "Pirivena" students' results issuing and analysis etc.

Furthermore, in many cases, it is necessary to create many art works (murals) in temples. Software like open office Draw has many facilities to do such artworks. This type of software does not available in Microsoft office suit (4) yet (Fig 04). Also open office Draw can be used to create artworks for office documents also. It is a great utility that helps create outstanding documents. Also anyone can use this software though he/she doesn't have a higher knowledge in graphic designing.

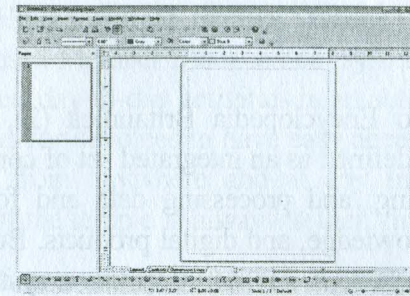


Fig 04

There are many language tools that can be used specially in Sinhala Language to make writing process easy. These tools are very useful in writing processes. We can use office software to write various types of documents. But there are several tools that make the writing function easy. Still, Buddhist temples are recognized as a hub of knowledge. But modern world electronic documents play an important role rather than printed documents. As results of it, Optical Character Recognition is another useful tool. It converts machine reading characters into editable characters (Fig 05). Therefore, it is very useful to preserve ancient writing into modern digitized world. The Language Laboratory of the University of Colombo (1) has developed such OCR that can be freely downloadable.



Fig 05

Also University of Colombo-Language Technology Research lab has developed many other tools in local languages. So, these office supporting software can be used to enhance quality of office activities.

Offline and online Temple Management information Systems

According to Encyclopedia Britannica (3), information systems can be defined as an integrated set of components for collecting, storing, and processing data and for delivering information, knowledge, and digital products. Business firms and other organizations rely on information systems to carry out and manage their operations, interact with their customers and suppliers, and compete (6).

Information systems are mainly focus on Business. But such systems can be used in managing temples. In countries like India, Hindu temples (kovils) (5) have been using such systems in day to- day activities (Fig. 06).



Fig. 06

There are number of benefits when such system is used. For example;

- Increasing the revenues for a temple.
- Reducing the expenses of the temple.
- Improving communications with all the relevant parties associated with a temple.
- Streamlining all the activities associated with the temple under a common umbrella and cut down on the time and effort required to run the temple.

HOMA (Hindu Temple Online Management System) is such a web based Member Management system that develops to manage their day-to-day activities in an automated manner. HOMA allows for devotees to have easy access to the temple management from anywhere and at any time so that the information of the temple is always at their finger tips.

HOMA functionality includes maintaining devotee information, managing pooja schedule, managing donations, generating various types of reports for temple management like priest scheduling report, donation history report and year end donation summary report.

A few of the key roles in a typical temple and their benefits are listed here.

- Board Member.
- Treasurer.
- Administrator.
- Monks/Priest.
- Devotee/Member.

However, many of such systems are custom built systems. But there are open source information systems like Remus.

Remus is a free Open Source client application for the management of information with a connection to multitude of data repositories and a desktop-integration for an optimal usage for the offline management, visualization and easy accessibility of information to the user. However it is better to get expert's help regarding such developments.

Proposed system for a Buddhist Temples

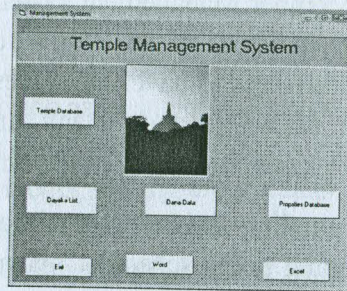


Fig. 07

Finally it is going to propose an Information Management System that can be used for a Buddhist Temple. The Interface of proposed system is shown in fig.07. This system has following capabilities.

1. Access to Databases (Both temple & Properties)
2. Access to Word & Excel Software systems
3. Access Dayaka (Devotees) & Dana Data

Conclusion

Now we can see that Information Technology can be used very well in managing Buddhist temples. But in Sri Lanka many Buddhist temples do not use Information Technology for Managing activities. Therefore it is required to take special attention regarding this matter and should launch special programmes to propagate benefits in this technology in management.

References

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- 3) Online Britannica: <http://www.britannica.com/>(2013)
- 4) Microsoft Office. <http://office.microsoft.com/en-001/>(2013)
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