

The Rise of a New Software Category: Web-enabled Personal Genealogy Databases

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1. Introduction

Today's lineage-linked genealogy software programs seems to fit in one of two categories. Borrowing sports terms, I call them "Home" and "Away." I examine key features of these traditional categories and introduce the new category, called "Near-by," with features drawn from each traditional category. We'll look at some examples of this new breed of program, meet their developers, and consider why these programs might signal the future of genealogy software.

2. Traditional Categories of Lineage-Linked Genealogy Programs

Features of traditional programs, by category

	Home	Away
Runs on	PC desktop or notebook computer	Mainframe or server
Program/Data owned by	Individual	Entity
User	Single	Many
Interface	Proprietary	Web
Access control	Private, physically isolated	Public, password protected
Linkages	Local data only	Across many submissions
Reports	Custom, book-like	Screen, not book
Web publishing	Export and upload	Native
Examples	PAF, FTM, Reunion, Legacy	FamilySearch, OneWorldTree, OneGreatFamily, Geni

3. New Category of Lineage-Linked Genealogy Programs

Rise of a new category has been enabled by increased power of PC, spread of open-source software. and low-cost availability of web-server space.

Features of programs in new category

	Near-by
Runs on	Server or PC
Program/Data owned by	Individual or Group
User	Single or many
Interface	Rich web, customized by owner, user
Access control	Password protected: public or private
Linkages	Internal data with links, multimedia
Reports	Custom or web
Web publishing	Native
Examples	PHPGedView, TNG, Retrospect GDS, PedigreeSoft service
Other	GEDCOM upload, download, Mashups

4. Enabling technologies

Apache web server, PHP and Perl middleware, MySQL database, Javascript client-side scripting

Open source movement makes these tools readily available.

5. Benefits of web programs

Data is wherever you can log in. No need to carry data.

Backups provided by ISP. Owner can extract data dump.

Enables collaboration in large projects: surname or place studies

Access control by user or user type, by data or data type, by tree or branch

Interface customizable by owner or by user as in a portal: plain or fancy

Multimedia include photos, videos, documents, all associated with one or multiple individuals. Create “clickable” faces in group photos.

Owner exercises control, as in Home program, allowing others to access or even edit data using access controls.

Like all good programs, these are fully GEDCOM compliant for upload and download. All include match/merge/markings of records.

Web mashups integrate related data from other sources, such as Google maps, IGI

6. Examples of web-enabled personal genealogy database programs

PHP GedView or PGV

Open source project; latest version downloaded 14,000 times

John Finlay, lead developer
(Instructor, Neumont University)

Home: <http://www.phpgedview.net>

Retrospect GDS

Open source project

Keith Morrison, lead developer

Home: <http://www.infused-solutions.com/retrospect>

The Next Generation of Genealogy Sitebuilding or TNG

Low-cost commercial product with over 4,600 licensed sites

Darrin Lythgoe, developer
(Senior PHP + Ajax developer, Footnote.com)

Home: <http://www.tngsitebuilding.com>

PedigreeSoft

Hosted subscription web service has over 1,200 subscribers.

Matt Garner, developer

Home: <http://www.pedigreesoft.com>