

Installing an ISP billing system

Which one?

Both have these attributes:

Written in PHP linked to MySQL databases with many tables.

Customer/Client has access to own information (name, address, email, etc. and can edit and change them). Naturally, they are excluded from the billing side of the system.

Have multiple choices of billing periods (weekly ... annually)

Produce invoices for email, pdf, or paper delivery.

Track both order/invoice amounts and payments received.

Billing dates, payment due dates, reminder dates all set per client/customer.

Citrus

I put in a good deal of time on this one, but ultimately bailed out. It had a lot of configurability but was difficult to manage from the administrative window.

Search/selection features are there but not very intuitive in terms of selecting a customer and then working with that record to perform other functions.

“Our mission is to provide an open source customer care and billing solution that can be used in many different service industries, including internet service, subscriptions, consulting, and telecommunications.”

CitrusDB is a web based customer care and billing software solution (CC&B) that uses PHP and a database back end (MySQL) to keep track of customer information, operational CRM, services, products, billing invoices and credit cards, and support information. It is licensed under the GPL version 2 open source license.”

<http://www.rtpnet.org/rulisonm/citrus103/citrusdb/index.php?load=tools&type=base#>

<http://www.citrusdb.org/>

Coin

Much more configurability, down to the nth degree. Seems to be organized a bit more sensibly.

Allows new clients to create themselves by 'ordering' a product or service and then completing own information to create a client record. Seems a little backwards, but avoids persons coming to site and entering a record without ordering anything.

Has seemingly curious requirement that each product be linked to each way in which it may be paid for (online, check, cc, etc.). This results in a table with one record for each product/payment pair. I see no need to have them associated, but it does enable a given invoice to be paid in multiple ways.

Has nice additional features:

- FAQ system as foreseen or as needed,
- Help desk system at need,
- Articles of whatever sort.

- All menus and input forms are configurable.
- Handles alternative languages: substitute one set of files for another set.

“In 2002 Mike Lansberry needed software for his [web-hosting business](#). ... By 2004 phpCOIN had grown so popular that Mike didn't have the time to keep pace with feature and support requests. Accordingly, in February 2004 Stephen Kitching took over as the new developer and owner of future versions. phpCOIN has continued to grow, and is now included in Fantastico and Installation auto-installation scripts. The user-base has grown to over thirty thousand installations worldwide, so several users have become part of the "phpCOIN Team", providing support and working on things like add-on modules, documentation, and more.”

<http://www.rtpnet.org/rulisonm/coin/login.php?w=user&o=logout>

<http://phpcoin.com>

For phpAdmin:

http://www.rtpnet.org/phpMyAdmin/index.php?lang=en-utf-8&server=1&collation=connection=utf8_general_ci&old_usr=citrus_admin

Major Obstacles:

- RTPnet already has a base of customers, which has been handled with a text file having chronological entries for each customer. Useable only by inspecting a block of customer information, then creating a billing email by hand.
- Hence, the desirability of installing customer base into chosen system via accessing MySQL and doing bulk insertion of data in various tables.
- My problems: sketchy knowledge of both PHP and MySQL, no formal or rigorous introduction but learning by doing, hunting for code snippets that seem to be models for what I needed. Lots of trial and error
- Much of time my home machine MySQL/Apache system was unavailable for local testing, which meant lots of repeated uploads, and when it was available, configuration sometimes lacked what I needed [e.g. Crypt()]. And debugging PHP when it gives me a blank screen is a real puppy!
- Started with spreadsheets for corralling the text data for customers, with fields to name/address/etc. & converted dates from letters to numbers, etc. etc.
- Schleppe these into text editors for creating MySQL INSERT statements to upload via phpAdmin.
- Ended up with a combination of MySQL table exports as .sql which were then edited in various ways.
- Current problem is getting initial passwords for all customers. I want to set these = their client number, but they must be passed through PHP crypt() function (found by code-searching. I am having trouble with finicky PHP syntax. If I can get that dataset built I will upload it into the client table and have a system in which I can ask clients to logon with their client number as password, whereupon they can change it, etc.

Michael Rulison | President | 919/782-9576
RTPnet, Public Information Network, Inc. www.rtpnet.org
3256 Lewis Farm Road Raleigh NC 27607-6723
rulisonm@rtpnet.org
