

# Heritage Cirqa 5.4 - New Release

We are delighted to announce the forthcoming release of Heritage Cirqa version 5.4. This release has many new useful updates and additions, but the most obvious difference is a re-design of menus and navigation.

One of the central considerations of this re-design was the effectiveness and purpose of icons in Heritage Cirqa. Over time, the number of icons in the system had grown as we attempted to create one for each menu function. Eventually this led to two main problems: that too many icons neutralise difference rather than clarify it and that the more esoteric the function (and library systems are fairly esoteric anyway) the more difficult it was to find a suitably clear graphical representation of it. If these two conditions led to users scrutinising icons longer than they should, or a dependence on other cues, such as menu text and/or screen position, then they were not doing the job intended. It is also worth mentioning that the Microsoft legacy icons used in previous versions of Heritage (and by many other suppliers) carried a sameness of style which probably reduced essential differences too. We decided, therefore, to replace individual icons with a scheme that could serve users better, by helping them navigate more instinctively and quickly through the system.

## Colour Leaf

In this release of Heritage Cirqa we replaced all individual menu icons with a two-tone colour 'leaf' motif. Each menu area is given a specific colour to help users recognise where they are in the system. We think this 'colour way' approach could be particularly helpful at busy times. For example at the enquiry desk, where breaking off and re-engaging with different parts of the system, time after time, requires an effortless re-acquaintance. The illustration below shows the associations we have made between colour and module areas and whilst we wouldn't claim any expertise in psychological association, we felt that it would be helpful to make Management functions red, to encourage circumspection in this sensitive area and Circulation control green, to add a small token of calmness to an often hectic context. Most functions will carry the colour of their parent menu, even when they appear on other menus too.



There are eight colours in all, but most systems will display fewer than that, depending on which modules are present.

## Function key shortcuts

Function key shortcuts have been available in Heritage for many years, saving time when navigating around the system and particularly when performing regular tasks. However, learning function keys can be a chore and users generally learn only the more frequently required ones. For other functions, users must either look up the key combinations on a virtual crib sheet (available via a function key!) or refer to printed material such as a key strip or a mouse mat. So how can function key combinations be visible all of the time, without getting in the way of the layout?



By incorporating function key shortcuts into the leaf icon, next to the menu option they relate to, we found a way to present them permanently without taking up additional screen space or distracting attention when they are not required. The darker portion of the leaf shows the function key and the lighter portion the modifier keys, such as Ctrl, Shift and Alt, where applicable.

Users can now see shortcuts at a glance, which we hope will make learning them easier as they can be enacted without prior knowledge and assimilation acquired through repeated use. Even those shortcuts that remain unlearned, might still be executed faster than via a mouse in many cases. Menu items are still numbered and so can be selected by that method for those that prefer it as before, however, using function keys remains the fastest way of selecting a particular option directly.

## Toolbar icons

In those parts of Heritage Cirqa where toolbar menus exist, such as in the Enquiry and Circulation modules, we have replaced the Microsoft legacy icon buttons with colour-coded leaf icons. The colours relate to the parent module in the same way as those used for menus and are divided by top section (lighter tone) to include a simple wireform graphic and a bottom section (darker tone) to include the function key where applicable. Functions that are not module specific are coloured grey to indicate their system-wide relevance, such 'Print', 'Clear' or 'Save'.



Print button



Renew button



Catalogue record button

We think that it is here, on toolbar menus, that function keys could be at their most useful. It is these functions that are used most often in many libraries and therefore where significant time savings might be found, cumulatively, through the working day.

## Drop-down icons

We felt there was room for improvement in the way drop-down menus presented and so made changes to increase clarity and legibility. The space between each item is bigger to aid legibility and only the more universally recognised functions, or those that we could apply a simple shorthand visual device to have icons next to them. The combination of fewer icons and increased space has decluttered drop-down menus and actually increased the significance of the symbols that remain.

The function key shortcuts remain next to menu items where applicable, as before.

## Let us know what you think

We hope that this menu re-design is useful to our users and much more than just a welcome cosmetic change. The balance between making functionality available, but not distracting when unrequired, is a difficult one to get right. In exchanging individual icons for a simple, colour-coded menu marker, we hope to help users clarify the different areas of the system at an instinctive and subconscious level. Whilst the addition of function keys to the screen layout should encourage those that use them already to memorise more and those that don't to give it a try and get more out of their time and resources in doing so.

