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# Optimizing Library Services: Access to Service Keeps the Academic Library Community Busy These Days

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other VIVA libraries), using the WCKB as a record delivery service was entirely new. Local procedures and documentation continue to develop, as do troubleshooting and effective error reporting skills, and the distinction between the local and consortial plan can cause confusion.

In addition to confusion about record management, the VIVA plan also adds complexity for ODU and other member libraries with local EBL plans through the possibility of duplicated titles. In order to avoid duplicates, there is a manual check completed at EBL once a month. Libraries are alerted to any duplicate titles so they can make a decision about keeping or pulling them on a case by case basis.

### Looking to the Future

If ODU continues to blend local and consortial DDA programs, it will create a number of interesting questions. ODU selectors already wrestle with how and if they should “select around” the titles on VIVA’s plan, and that is while it is still in a pilot phase. Usage in a DDA program is also a complex issue, such as comparing a browse to a loan, identifying usage within the loan period, and noting continuing use after a title has been purchased. Collection

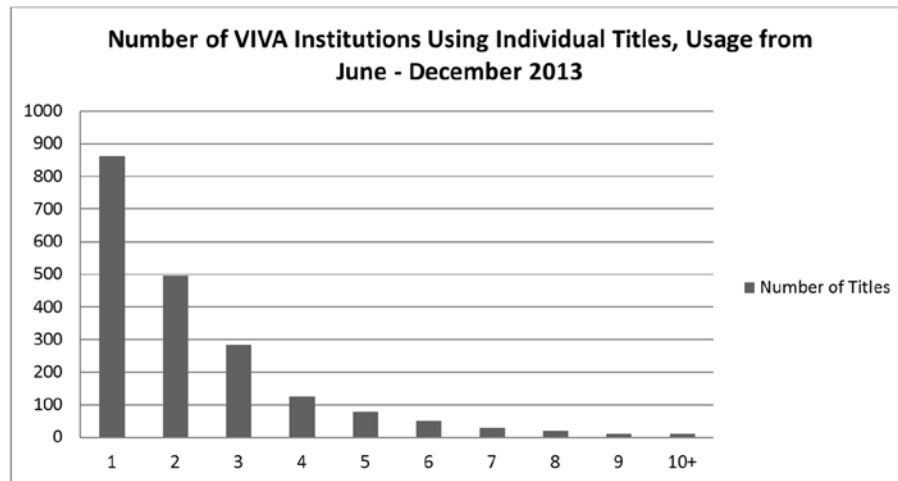


Figure 5: VIVA Title Use across Institutions

development personnel at ODU have begun the discussion of how DDA usage, both at the local and the consortial level, can be likened to the usage of other eBook collections so that the benefits and costs of each can be fairly compared.

The positive impact of VIVA’s DDA plan on ODU’s collections and services, however, is clear for the simple reason that it is getting

used. From July to December 2013, ODU users made 535 downloads of 222 titles — titles that ODU otherwise might not have been able to provide. As there are different advantages to each DDA program, it seems likely that ODU will continue to wrestle with the challenge of multiple DDA programs as long as the projects continue. 🌱

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## Optimizing Library Services — Access to Service Keeps the Academic Library Community Busy These Days

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Ever since the Internet inspired the creation of Web-based, accessible materials, many libraries have developed a Web presence so their service populations can access information and various library materials. New, emerging technologies continually create more effective ways for managing, searching, retrieving, storing, and preserving information, data, records, and important documents.

While keeping abreast of new technologies poses challenges, academic libraries, in particular, consider this as an opportunity to improve access to new expressions of content for their users. In many ways, improving access is synonymous with improving services and a look at past endeavors along with current happenings gives direction for the future.

In the early years, the library catalog was the focus of attention. Academic libraries created and built legacy systems in an effort to automate the catalog and various technical services functions. The catalog offered patrons quicker access to the library’s holdings and, theoretically, technical services librarians and staff were able to deliver materials to the stacks

faster for patron use. Gradually, though, the catalog was considered an inaccurate representation of a library’s possessions due to the influx of journals that resided in aggregator databases that became part of the initial online products for libraries courtesy of the Internet. Also, many librarians were hesitant to use the 856 field in the MARC catalog record because the links would often break as publishers perfected their online platforms. Many concluded that the legacy system catalog would become extinct in a Web-based environment.

The academic library community was understandably excited when **Serials Solutions** offered a way to produce an A-Z list of journal holdings residing in online databases, the OpenURL ushered in SFX (and subsequent variations) for linking between databases, and vendor records and durable links could be added to the library catalog with less concern as to their accuracy. Proprietary integrated library systems offered more seamless ways to handle the daily activities for acquisitions, serials, and cataloging. Additional products for federated searching and digitizing items typically held

in special collections were developed and electronic resource management systems were introduced to assist librarians with managing the numerous licensing agreements and subscription information that accompanied each journal, database, or online resource. Despite these terrific advances, new challenges arise on a regular basis.

So what activities are keeping the academic library community busy these days?

### Issues and Challenges

I recently edited a book for **IGI Global** that focuses on the answer to this very question. *Cases on Electronic Records and Resource Management Implementation in Diverse Environments* is a collection of examples of electronic records and resource management implementation in various settings. Section 1 of the title contains a number of chapters discussing the ongoing issues in academic library communities that impact the level of access, and ultimately service, that the library can offer its patrons.

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In many respects the challenges are either the same or similar as librarians and staff are dealing with new or open technologies to process information for catalogs, to build digital repositories for research and special collections, to manage licenses and subscriptions, and to enhance search functions across all content, whether owned, licensed, or Web-based. What is noticeably different is the increase in the amounts and types of content being offered through improved levels of access.

The ease and accuracy of batch loading vendor records for electronic collections into the catalog remains a concern and can vary in work load according to the specific proprietary or open source integrated library system in use. In some instances an additional program, MarcEdit, can be used to address inconsistencies or lack of information in the record. In other situations, the OPAC display of the record requires alterations to make it more user friendly with regard to description, location, and links. Differences in electronic format type, such as those between journals, books, streaming music, and streaming video also call for specific solutions.

Overall, policy decisions, at the local, consortia, or both levels, are necessary to stipulate an acceptable length of time to edit the record before making it public and accessible. On the horizon and underway are issues associated with the recent change in cataloging standards

— that is, the move to Resource Description and Access (RDA). As catalogers begin to use the new standards and as vendors produce records according to RDA, records created according to both sets of standards will exist together, producing obvious inconsistencies for users.

### Digital Repositories and Open Source Initiatives

Digital repositories remain a priority. Faculty or student research continues to be preserved and shared through institutional repositories. While levels of access for nonaffiliated users may vary, many open access initiatives have gained momentum and academic libraries play key roles in their development as well as those initiatives having more complex issues. The **University of North Texas Libraries'** work with electronic theses and dissertations in music serves as a good example. Since doctoral work in music often requires accompanying files for performance and recitals, appropriately cataloging, linking, and preserving streaming audio files for the **University of North Texas** community are a concern, especially since older formats, such as cassette tapes and compact discs are no longer the norm. The digitization of special collections in academic libraries creates public access to additional, unique, and valuable information and content. A noteworthy example is the Topaz Japanese-American Relocation Center Digital Collection at **Utah State University's Merrill-Cazier Library**. Originally undertaken to support a freshman orientation course, it remains as part of a larg-

er collection of the **Mountain West Digital Library**. Also noteworthy are the efforts of the **National Taiwan University Library** in building an accessible database for the digital photographs and videos documenting the cultures of the indigenous Taiwan people.

Open source initiatives for library operations are now considered by some to be a viable option to the proprietary library systems and associated products that have emerged over the past five to ten years. Open source Electronic Resource Management Systems (ERMS) have been implemented by some academic librarians and, as with any computer application and program, advantages and disadvantages are evident. One definite advantage for both the library and the user is that subscription information can be made available in the OPAC so the library patron can easily see what content is or is not accessible, especially with regard to journal literature.

### New Models

All of the above are good and relevant examples of how academic libraries are serving their respective user groups by improving upon available technologies to create content and make it more accessible. There is movement, however, towards new models of library solutions that can reduce the silos of information that are produced by integrated library systems, content management systems for digital objects, federated search products, and other programs that have been designed to work in conjunction with library systems.

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Discovery programs offer effective, efficient, and relevant search results by drawing from data and records residing in a library's catalog, databases, online subscriptions, linked Websites, linked resources, and print holdings. EBSCO Discovery Services and the Summon Service from Serial Solutions are two search tools that have been in place for a few years and deliver content more efficiently than the earlier federated search products. Using a discovery program can position an academic library to increase access services for library and, in some cases, institutional content.

Serious attention needs to be given to the next generation of library systems, linked data on the Semantic Web, and metadata. The integrated library systems now in use are becoming the legacy systems of the past. The key vendors in library solutions are now marketing their next generation library management systems that promise to unify library operations across all formats even more seamlessly than before via cloud technology. The next generation systems are designed to not only handle traditional library processes and content but can now address collaborative collection development across libraries and include different content, such as data sets produced during research. Additional key benefits available are the incorporation of usage data, cost per use information, and peer collection comparisons to assist with collection development and the integration of electronic license and subscription information for license management. The new catch phrase seems to be uniform resource management.

### Metadata Management

A distinctive capability involves metadata. There is a new emphasis on collaboration with regard to metadata management. A definite focus on the sharing of metadata structures and ontologies, adaptable to local needs, is prominent in the library management systems entering the marketplace. Undoubtedly, this feature would assist academic librarians when developing institutional repositories of faculty and student research and creating digital collections of unique and special collections, such as the Topaz Japanese-American Relocation Center Digital Collection at Utah State University's Merrill-Cazier Library and the cultural database of the indigenous Taiwan people at National Taiwan University Library. One result of shared metadata is increased and improved access to all sorts of content, data, and information.

One cannot help wondering, though, if there is more behind the idea of shared metadata management being introduced into library systems, especially those directed at academic and research communities. An obvious conclusion reached after reading Karen Coyle's series of articles in *Library Technology Reports* is that metadata plays a key role in connecting and linking data on the Web. She sees the library community's acceptance of the Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records (FRBR), RDA, and the desire of the Library of Congress to transition to a new bibliographic framework embracing Semantic Web technologies as a way for libraries to move away from creating and storing silos of information and content.

### The Semantic Web

It is imperative that libraries, especially academic and research libraries, embrace the idea of shared, linked data across the Web. After all, in many respects, this is where knowledge and content are created, organized, and preserved for future access. Academic librarians and the information technology staff servicing the library have developed an expertise over time with regard to library solutions and technologies currently used. This expertise is needed to decipher and to interpret the Semantic Web technologies and programming as they relate to library materials and created content. In her description of the Semantic Web and linked data, Coyle (2012) discusses approximately twenty



data element and class structures currently in use to describe Web resources, people, places, intellectual property rights, citations, bibliographic expressions, authorities, and preservation. There are also approximately twenty or so corresponding controlled vocabularies, subject lists, and thesauri for use with Web resources, library, and non-library materials and information. Completing the list are twenty or more Semantic Web development and software creation tools. While much of the elements, classes, properties, and vocabularies can be created algorithmically, human intervention is required to effectively create meaningful links to rich content. Academic libraries have cultivated the human expertise needed to extract the commonalities in metadata elements and properties necessary to make linked data work for libraries.

Coyle (2012) points out that, so far, only programmers and developers are comfortable using and working with linked data technologies for the most part. She indicates that the original goal of the Semantic Web was to produce a web of data embedded in HTML documents instead of joining together discrete sets of Web-based data. Given the different intricacies of schemes, structures, and mark-

up languages used to organize data and make it linkable, programmer and developer interest is understandable and not surprising. This also could explain the amount and variety of data elements and the number of subject lists and thesauri that have developed since each one would most likely be working within his or her area of interest, discipline, or profession. To date, most of the activity has centered on scientific, particularly biomedical, research and government information. In order to expand the user base for Semantic Web technologies, Coyle emphasizes the need for a user-friendly interface to facilitate the use of linked data.

### The Library's Role

This is where the academic library can become a key player and raise the level of its services. Academic librarians, especially those engaged in technical services and systems activities, can refocus their energies towards the future implications of linked data for libraries. Building on the previous work of programmers and developers, librarians can become collaborative leaders in designing tools and applications that will offer to any user a friendly, intuitive interface that becomes a gateway to an even greater variety of materials, such as scientific and medical research, historical content, special collections, government information, and publications, just to name a few. It is time for academic libraries to stop creating and maintaining silos of information that provide access via library portals. Instead, library content should link out to Web content and Web content should link to library content seamlessly, by passing specialized Web pages, portals, or catalogs.

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