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# Biz of Acq -- The Conversion Problem: One State's Migration of Acquisitions Data

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## Biz of Acq — The Conversion Problem: One State's Migration of Acquisitions Data

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*Column Editor's Note: Libraries of the South Dakota Library Network migrated from the PALS library management system to ExLibris Aleph 500. The authors describe the effect of the migration on the library acquisitions process at two small state universities.*

### ACQUISITIONS

The libraries within the **South Dakota Library Network (SDLN)** include approximately seventy college, public, school, government, regional library groups, and special libraries across the state. They include both public and private institutions. They share one library management system maintained by **SDLN**, located in the remote hills of western South Dakota. Actually, **SDLN** is located in the spartan basement of the **E. Y. Berry Library** on the campus of **Black Hills State University** in Spearfish, South Dakota, a locale famous for

its proximity to Sturgis, Deadwood, Mt. Rushmore, and nothingness.

When the state's ILS conversion began in 2003 (it was completed in August 2004), South Dakota decided not to convert acquisitions data from the existing **PALS (Project for Automated Library Services)** to the **Ex Libris Aleph** library management system, version 16.0. This was no insignificant decision. Of the approximately seventy libraries that used the existing **PALS** library management system, only ten percent used the acquisitions subsystem. This provided little basis for a proverbial ground swell of support for conversion of acquisitions data.

This loss of data included the loss of vendor files, serials pricing trends, standing order information, and, of course, the loss of years of retrospective acquisitions information for all formats. These losses ranged from a bit troublesome to the truly unfortunate.

Vendor file conversion fit the former category.

The libraries that used the **PALS** acquisitions system maintained a shared vendor file, a less than ideal situation because each library demanded unique information that in turn required duplicate vendor records. **Aleph** provides separate files for each institution, and it also offers more and better fields for more detailed vendor information. Although converting a shared file to separate files is a burden no one wants to shoulder, each institution gladly re-input its vendor records into **Aleph**. For the most part, libraries in South Dakota are small institutions that purchase English language materials using U.S. dollars. Vendors are few.

No current orders survived the conversion. Acquisitions ceased ordering well before the slated conversion date. The fiscal year and the date of conversion somewhat conveniently coincided. The conversion date, however, became

*continued on page 58*

notorious for its slippage. That slippage stopped the order process for many more months than anticipated, a problem about which no one seemingly expressed concern.

Unlike **PALS**, **ExLibris' Aleph** better affords the opportunity to export bibliographic records at the point of order. For a small library that purchases material described by **Library of Congress** cataloging with bibliographic records obtained from **OCLC**, no reason exists for not implementing this now-standard routine. Amusingly, **SDLN** systems staff never seemed to understand the need for real-time export. They remained contrary in their efforts to implement anything other than a daily batch load.

Non-technical services staff raised all the usual non-technical services objections to point of order export, sometimes for good reason. **SDLN** systems failed to implement tables that automatically change order status from pre-order, on-order, post-order, etc. Occasional failure of technical services staff to rekey manually codes and to un-suppress after receipt proved problematic. Interlibrary Loan objected to setting the **OCLC** holdings byte prior to receipt. Perhaps the cost of ILL part-time student labor loomed larger than that of full-time technical services staff and the **OCLC** costs required to set the holding byte via a second, post-receipt **OCLC** search.

Standing order practices changed. For materials cataloged separately, staff input in **PALS** a serial record and to that record attached order records and item records to receive the titles. This practice collocated standing order receipts. Staff could also link the item record to its monographic record. With a series search, both the serial record and its corresponding monographic records displayed in the public catalog; the serial record offered a summary holdings display generated from the item records.

**Aleph** does not support this practice. Only one item record can be attached to one bibliographic record. Staff continues to input a serial standing-order record for its need for bibliographic control but then suppresses the record from public view. Staff then catalogs materials post-receipt. Most libraries in South Dakota have no previous practice of inputting series authority records.

One of the more difficult aspects of the conversion proved to be the least anticipated: the conversion from a first generation, text-based system to a third generation, graphical user interface (**GUI**) system. **PALS** offered an efficient, effective text-based ordering system with which staff had intimate familiarity. **Aleph** offers a windows interface requiring much pointing and clicking, seemingly all over the screen: top, bottom, left, right, and middle. Dexterity with a mouse, the order of points and clicks, faulty memory, less than adequate documentation and training, and a flaky implementation all conspired to encourage a transition from mouse to trackball and the introduction of **RICE**: rest, ice, compression, and elevation of lower arm, wrist, and hand. Some staff even became ambidextrous track ball converts.

## SERIAL HOLDINGS

The conversion of serial holdings from **PALS** to **ExLibris Aleph** presented yet another labor intensive project. **PALS** had no holding record. It instead generated a holdings display with information gathered from the item records. With no holdings record, the library could not convert that which never existed. Instead, staff would key ANSI-style enumeration and chronology into an **ExLibris MARC** holding record.

The conversion did map enumeration and chronology from the **PALS** item record to the **ExLibris** item record. Like **PALS**, the **ExLibris** item record also functions as the check-in record. Each currently-received issue requires the creation of an item record. This record structure varies from other systems, like **III's Millennium**, which uses a separate check-in "card" and requires no item record for current periodicals.

A description of serials holdings procedures is appropriate at this point in order to elucidate the new work required of library staff to construct the holding record. To create holding records, staff reviews the **ExLibris** conversion of item records. At their best, these item records constitute detailed holdings: i.e., holdings at ANSI level four with both highest and lowest levels of enumeration and chronology. From these item record displays, staff input an ANSI level three summary holdings statement in a **MARC 866** text field.

Most libraries input separate serial holding records for current issues, bound, microform, oversized, different locations, etc., rather than one holding record with multiple 866 fields. Regardless of the practice, currently-received statements for bound or microform titles may end with an "open hyphen." Items shelved in current periodicals may contain a free text field,

"Library retains current issues until bound," or similar statement depending upon retention. Staff input location information into a **MARC 852** field.

For periodicals, some libraries attach holdings for both paper and microform to the one bibliographic record describing the paper version. For a title held in paper, microform, and the ever ubiquitous electronic version, the public display in many libraries also consists of one bibliographic record describing the paper. Many libraries input the 856 field in just the bibliographic record, but **Aleph** does provide the option to input this field into both the bibliographic record and the holdings record.

Some catalogs contain no bibliographic records for electronic versions purchased from aggregators. Reference may manually maintain these titles on a Website in separate local lists, both an online journals list and database lists providing title and subject access. "Duplicate" bibliographic records

for electronic versions confuse the patrons. It's better to have a stand-alone list, or so the reasoning goes.

## CONCLUSIONS

**God** could create the world in six days because he had no legacy systems or bad data with which to work. Not so with conversion, which is simply that: conversion, not creation. The task relies upon data input using previous local, provincial, and sometimes seemingly insane practices. Ergo, the current public displays using current software and hardware reflect past practices. For example, item record displays contain both upper and lower level enumeration but only higher level chronology because, well, that's what the spine label said. Bending to demands of legacy systems and bad data, the most important task for conversion supervisors is to decide which conversion problems to ignore, for which there exists no dearth. 🍀



## And They Were There

### United Kingdom Serials Group Conference

Column Editor: **Sever Bordeianu** (University of Mexico) <sbordeia@unm.edu>



**United Kingdom Serials Group Conference**  
3-5 April 2006, University of Warwick, UK

Report by **Fytton Rowland** (Loughborough University)  
and **Hazel Woodward** (Cranfield University)

Once again the **UKSG Conference** was of record size — about 650 delegates — and the **University of Warwick** is currently the only UK university that can accommodate it. Fortunately it is a very satisfactory venue! And as usual the **UKSG Committee** had put together an attractive programme, with a good mix of the usual suspects and unlikely candidates

among the speakers. There seemed to be close to a majority of speakers from the USA in the main plenary sessions.

The first speaker, **Professor Carole Goble** from the School of Computer Science at the **University of Manchester**, works in bioinformatics providing systems to support

*continued on page 59*