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Working Better Together: Library, Publisher, and Vendor Perspectives

Maria Collins
North Carolina State University, Maria_Collins@ncsu.edu

Mary Somerville
University of Colorado Denver, Mary.Somerville@ucdenver.edu

Nicole Pelsinsky
Serials Solutions, Nicole.Pelsinsky@serialssolutions.com

Aaron Wood
Alexander Street Press, awood@astreetpress.com

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Working Better Together: Library, Publisher, and Vendor Perspectives

Maria D. Collins, Head of Acquisitions and Discovery, North Carolina State University

Mary M. Somerville, University Librarian/Library Director, University of Colorado Denver

Nicole Pelsinsky, Manager of Implementation Services, Serials Solutions

Aaron Wood, Vice President of Systems and Data Architecture, Alexander Street Press

Abstract

Amidst more and more publisher content, research tools, and library systems, interoperability—how things work together (for instance, a link resolver and a discovery service, or a data service and a discovery service)—has tremendous implications for workflows for librarians and, ultimately, researchers. With a focus on discoverability, representatives from the library, vendor, and publisher sectors describe their perspectives on cross-sector collaborations and opportunities with a common aim of proactively continuing to refine/improve the researcher experience. Moderated by Mary Somerville from the University of Colorado, Denver, this presentation highlighted perspectives from all three sectors including Maria Collins from North Carolina State University Libraries presenting the library perspective, Nicole Pelsinsky from Serials Solutions presenting from the vendor perspective, and Aaron Wood from Alexander Street Press with the publisher perspective.

Introduction

Tumultuous changes in the scholarly communications ecosystem have disrupted traditional academic library roles, altered conventional cross-sector relationships, and established new researcher workflows. Amidst such global disequilibrium, librarians are reconsidering traditional assumptions and evaluating new approaches that position libraries more favorably because, ultimately, successful adaptation requires “a new way of thinking and working” (Somerville, 2013a) to accomplish the “new work to be done” (Somerville, 2013c).

In the rapidly evolving scholarly environment, new efficiencies in workflows for library staff and associated improvements to discoverability for academic researchers require heightened collaboration among libraries, publishers, and vendors (Somerville, Schader, & Sack, 2012; Somerville & Conrad, 2013a; 2013b). Especially rich collaboration opportunities focus on improving discovery within the scholarly ecosystem of publisher content, research tools, and library systems.

Moderated by Mary Somerville from the University of Colorado, Denver, this presentation highlighted perspectives from all three sectors

including Maria Collins from North Carolina State University (NCSU) Libraries presenting the library perspective, Nicole Pelsinsky from Serials Solutions presenting from the vendor perspective, and Aaron Wood from Alexander Street Press with the publisher perspective. Collins presented her experiences at NCSU Libraries as a case study to establish context for library/vendor/publisher partnerships, and, within that framework, Pelsinsky and Wood provided a response from their perspectives.

Library Perspective: North Carolina State University Libraries Case Study

Background

Effectively “working better together” with cross-sector partners requires heightened organizational readiness (Somerville & Antelman, 2013; Somerville, 2013b) within library organizations. Toward that end, over the past decade, NCSU Libraries has reinvented its workplace, a process that culminated in the opening of a new facility—the James B. Hunt Library (Hunt)—in January 2013. Technical services operations or the Acquisitions and Discovery (A&D) department within the Libraries has also evolved significantly over this period of

time, including a recent merger of acquisitions and cataloging services in June of 2011.

In addition, all A&D staff moved to the new Hunt Library just 5 months after the merger in November 2011. In order to facilitate the move and merger, A&D managers reviewed all processes to consider what could be outsourced and what could be combined. Managers also worked with administration to determine a new department structure that more accurately supported the work of managing electronic resources. Managers were able to accomplish these large-scale changes in part due to a history of partnerships with vendors that allowed staff to streamline and support workflows over the previous 10 years.

NCSU's organizational culture contributed in part to the willingness of A&D managers to partner with the vendor and publisher community. In general, staff are willing to take risks and try new processes. Failure is not viewed as a negative but as opportunity for iterative growth. Try it, evolve it, try it again. In fact, after the move to Hunt, each unit in the department implemented biweekly scrums, or quick stand up touch base meetings where you quickly review priorities and work. These meetings help people to know what is going on and more quickly adjust their work depending on department priorities. The A&D department also has great support from the Information Technology (IT) department for developing and implementing systems-related solutions (such as our locally developed electronic resource management (ERM) system—E-matrix). These factors have provided a cultural readiness at NCSU that has contributed to a history of partnerships.

Partnership Examples

The selected partnership examples presented by Collins represent a range of services supporting technical services operations, management, and discovery. For each example listed below, the following is provided: participating partners, brief description of the service, and the benefits of the service to NCSU. Collectively, the benefits from each service have shaped and influenced the culture of the department and NCSU's willingness

to experiment and reinvent how technical services operations should function.

Example: Shelf-Ready Service with Yankee Book Peddler (YBP)

Similar to other universities, NCSU has contracted with YBP for shelf-ready services. Through this service, the A&D department was able to outsource processes like copy cataloging and physical preparation of materials to free up resources. This has allowed A&D staff to have the mental space and time to learn new processes, which became critical after the merger. Staff now have to focus on cross-training efforts. Most importantly, outsourcing what used to be core work has assisted staff in developing a new mental framework for what constitutes technical services work. They have become more flexible about giving up sacred cows and the notion that change is impossible due to the extreme volume of "traditional tasks" that need completion.

Example: Data Support for E-Matrix

NCSU's locally developed ERM system, E-matrix, is a downstream system and dependent on data sources to populate the database. Throughout the development of this system, librarians worked out arrangements for support with vendors whenever possible. This includes work with EBSCO Information Services (EBSCO) to construct links within E-matrix that take users into EBSCO's EBSCONET. NCSU developers also worked with Serials Solutions to obtain a regular report of NCSU's knowledge base data to load daily into E-matrix.

Vended support for ERM-related data provided NCSU with numerous benefits including access to data managed by another source, such as EBSCO's subscription management information in EBSCONET. EBSCO provides important views into the data such as title relationships that are useful for staff. Rather than try to replicate these efforts, partnering with EBSCO provided a means to a desired end with minimal resources. Consequently, NCSU's in-house developers were able to focus on other functionality to build out in E-matrix, and staff were able to make more immediate use of the tool without the hours of

data entry that other ERM systems require. These data partnerships served as a compliment to NCSU's in-house tool.

Example: GOKb—Global Open Knowledgebase Project

NCSU is a partnering institution involved in the development of a Global Open Knowledgebase or GOKb. GOKb, which is funded through a grant with the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, will serve as the knowledge base (kb) for Kuali OLE and provide a freely available, community-managed data set for kb communities, including other knowledge base vendors. Partners in this initiative include JISC, Kuali OLE institutions, and the publisher community.

This kind of large-scale initiative further explores conversations in the community about kb standards, normalization of kb data, and the exchange of kb data across systems. NCSU librarians participating in the project have obtained expert knowledge in global package management which enhances their ability to manage journal collections at the local level. They are also actively engaging in an international network of experts in this area of work.

Example: Demand-Driven Acquisitions (DDA)

Like many universities, NCSU has also implemented demand-driven acquisitions (DDA). NCSU's current DDA service is through ebrary with administrative support from YBP. NCSU is in the process of expanding DDA with other vendors and will continue to consolidate administration with YBP.

These partnerships have proven beneficial for several reasons. The DDA process itself evolves the selection experience, transforming how libraries conceptualize what they do for collection building and access. It provides an opportunity to realize cost savings with a more limited focus on what patrons want now, rather than what they could want later. Through the use of YBP, monographic purchases are consolidated into a single view through YBP's GOBI. In addition, these kinds of partnerships also help technical services staff build an understanding of how data move

and is stored across systems, which is an important foundation for troubleshooting in an automated environment.

Example: MARC Record Services

Likewise, NCSU also partners with OCLC and Serials Solutions for MARC record services. Again, this allows NCSU to tap into a collective brain trust rather than build out these services in isolation. Staff save time in their work, are able to focus on other tasks, and gain a better understanding of global data networks.

Example: Endeca

In 2005, NCSU was one of the first academic libraries to implement Endeca, a discovery service that provides for faceted searching. Rather than spend the time to develop a similar tool in house, NCSU realized the potential of paying for this service instead. This partnership has since extended to TRLN through the development of TRLN Endeca, which provides a single catalog search experience for TRLN institutions.

This example illustrates a fundamental tenet of a philosophy held by NCSU's former head of IT, Andrew Pace, who is now with OCLC. He often said that you build it yourself until vendors can provide a more viable solution, then you move on to focus on other problems that vendors have not yet solved. This philosophy reflects several ideas that are often embraced by NCSU: an institution should be willing to experiment, there is value in cost/benefit analysis, and, consequently, value in understanding what is occurring in the marketplace.

Impact of Partnerships

So, in a nutshell, what are the results of these kinds of partnerships? They create and support better data, better linking, better discovery, and better ERM. Partnerships can also provide access to global information networks. They free up local resources and supplement existing local systems. They allow outsourcing or automating of rote processes to free up resources for more complex processes. Partnerships build global communities of interest with greater influence than what a single institution could provide.

In terms of cultural results for NCSU, these partnerships were a contributing factor towards transformative change. As staff worked to automate processes, they have shifted to more holistic/life-cycle driven workflows. When NCSU merged acquisitions and cataloging, staff already had a strong understanding of how to analyze their current work and implement new processes. Vendor partnerships contributed to the reorganization by reducing handoffs and creating efficiencies.

Consequently, staff now have time to focus on mainstreaming e-resource management processes. They are making the shift from production to analytical work. Finally, they have a systems-centric philosophy of work. Library staff now better understand data transformations and connections and the ultimate impact on the user. Librarians have the flexibility to buy or build, depending on the best choice for the user. Also, staff make quicker leaps between identification of the problem and the solution. This should allow staff to be more open to future areas of development or innovations.

Best Practices for Partnerships

Of course, effective partnerships do not just happen overnight and require effort from all sides. From a library perspective, for partnerships to be successful, iterative communication (formally and informally) about deliverables, expectations and deadlines should be defined up front. At the same time, library staff need to remain flexible and willing to experiment, accept, and grow functionality.

Library staff should remain open to nontraditional partners and nontraditional solutions and recognize that publishers and vendors are often trying to solve many of the same problems as libraries. Also, engaging stakeholders across the institution through structured involvement always improves buy-in of new solutions. Making space for new processes by letting go of what is no longer needed or processes that are unnecessary is critically important. Finally, being aware of what is going on in the community with initiatives, services, and standards—through ongoing

environmental scans—always helps people to imagine future solutions.

Vendor Perspective—Serials Solutions

As you can see from the NCSU case study and analysis, the relationship between libraries, service providers, and content providers is the foundation for continuous improvement for staff workflows and the patron research experience. This is the vendor or service provider perspective based on the tangible results realized by NCSU. The case study above essentially outlines NCSU's implementation process. The concept of implementation—whether it is a product/service, a workflow or both—provides the foundation upon which improvements can be built. But the implementation process also has challenges. It requires investments of time, money, and staffing and can only be disruptive by nature. However, the implementation process should be seen as a partnership between a service provider and library, and both parties should recognize that each will need to provide a certain amount of investment, working together and independent from each other.

Service providers can help ensure that this partnership is successful by providing some key elements to the library staff: an overview of the process and milestones (perhaps using a project plan or checklist); assisting the library in identifying key staff that can contribute their expertise during that process (although they may not be involved for the entirety of the process); and setting clear expectations of what the service provider delivers and the expected deliverables from the library. Service providers should also include reference materials and training to help along the way, and these should be revised and improved over time based on knowledge amassed by working with many different libraries. The end result of the implementation should clearly show improvements—for instance, enhancing a patron's research process, better/wider access to the library's content, or a savings in staff time or effort.

One of the methods to save staff time and effort is to improve content tracking and the reporting capabilities for the library. This helps the staff

understand what collections are being used by patrons and how to evaluate and refine their collections. To facilitate tracking, many libraries choose to adopt an ERM system. The adoption of an ERM provides a single access point to capture information about their content; an expectation of consistency of data and reporting within the system being used; and, if instituted as a staff policy, this system can serve as the authoritative resource for the library's assets and information about those assets. ERM systems help libraries stay organized by acting as a single repository for licensing, contacts, and cost information that staff can commonly access and use. Historically, populating an ERM has required a lot of manual labor and data entry, but data templates and uploaders—as well as data population services—can now ease that burden for library staff. Continued reporting standards adoption (like COUNTER and SUSHI) have also facilitated the ability to use, and expect, consistent data. Some service provider administrative consoles can also allow for reporting on holdings information and click-through statistics. Many include some basic discoverability access for patrons as well; an example of this is the A–Z list.

Maintenance of data and library holdings is another investment of time and staff work for the library. Identifying and selecting the metadata that represent the library's collections requires ongoing updates to the systems that then facilitate access to the content through a discovery layer. This work is also closely tied to understanding what the underlying service provider knowledge base can support.

How service providers work with content providers is also a key element to reducing the overhead for library staff. The relationship between content providers and discovery-layer service providers is critical. From the discovery layer perspective, a service provider should be vested in representing content provider data as accurately as possible. One way to do this is to optimize how the metadata are mapped. This ensures that content appearing in the user interface (UI) of a discovery layer makes sense.

For instance, the title is “where” a patron would expect to see a title within the results. This also allows the search algorithms running behind the scenes to reliably and consistently pull back the appropriate results. Another valuable aspect of a partnership between service providers and content providers is the potential to take advantage of new and unique data elements as they make sense in the UI or search, that is, Web of Science citations. These unique elements can enhance the research experience and add value to how a researcher can mentally parse their results.

Finally, some service providers not only gather metadata but make improvements to it as necessary. An example of this would be pulling together data from various publishers to build a more robust representation of a title. As a result, there is the ability to further cement a partnership by providing content providers with feedback to potentially refine their native data. This can result in improving the research experience either through a discovery layer or on a specific provider platform.

Another example of positive outcomes from partnerships between content providers and service providers is illustrated by continuous improvements to linking. OpenURL linking has been the de facto solution over time to provide the handshake between metadata and UI and native content. As a service provider that has many products that act as a conduit to content, Serials Solutions has participated in NISO's efforts to refine and improve the industry's adoption of data standards. However, platforms, data, and exchanges all constitute a potential barrier to results. Serials Solutions also strives to continuously innovate in their approach to OpenURL and to find alternate methods to provide the pathway to the content. Direct linking has been introduced as one such improvement. Direct linking relies on data consistency between a service provider and content provider and can facilitate linking when publishers have platforms that change frequently or when metadata inconsistencies occur. Instead of relying on ISSNs, titles, and start pages, the identifier is utilized from the native source.

Publisher Perspective—Alexander Street Press

Providing the publisher or content provider perspective, Woods discussed collaborative efforts between service providers and content providers. His examples centered on data, linking, and maintenance. Data are particularly important within publisher and vendor relationships in respect to discovery layers in order to take advantage of publisher content to improve the research process. Effective data management is largely about optimizing metadata mappings between the content and service providers and allowing for database recommendation as part of the process of searching.

For instance, Alexander Street Press has already worked to optimize metadata mappings with Summon from Serials Solutions and just needs to confirm that nonarticle databases are part of the Summon recommender. When Alexander Street first started sending track-level audio metadata to Summon, the mapping from Alexander Street's MARCxml into Summon's modified MODS was reliant on the overall MARC to MODS mappings, which were optimized for monographic and serial content, not component part content, such as tracks. This resulted in lists of seemingly identical track results, since there was little metadata to differentiate them based on the mapping. Alexander Street Press and Summon worked together to make the mapping inclusive of other publication-related fields, such as the 773 (Host Item Information), so that end users could differentiate based on album title, label, and release date. In addition, Summon's suggested specialized collections based on user searches are inclusive of multimedia databases and highlight Alexander Street Press music collections.

Effective linking involves the publisher, vendor and the library and is instrumental in ensuring seamless access to content using data from the publisher. Discovery services had tended to be reliant on link resolvers for the delivery of content. This was problematic for nonjournal, nonbook content, particularly the archival and

multimedia content that Alexander Street Press provides. At the 2010 Charleston Conference, Summon and Alexander Street Press talked this through, and direct linking was the result. Summon has now introduced direct links to aid the access issue for multimedia as well as archival content and dissertations.

Effective relationships across publishers, vendors and libraries to improve maintenance (or how overhead associated with content maintenance can be reduced) are closely tied to how knowledge bases work and what they support. For example, there is potential for having MARC records for multimedia delivered via a MARC record service such as Serials Solutions 360 MARC, as well as for cover art, etc., to be delivered through a service like Syndetics (Bowker). Going even further, there is potential for activations of databases/collections for Summon, A–Z, etc., to take place between the publisher and the vendor using shared customer and database files. All of these represent future possibilities.

Conclusion

Partnerships across the library community can serve as a lynchpin to facilitate change in the culture of an organization, in how work is performed, and in how services can be delivered. They allow for transformational change as library professionals think smarter and broader. For libraries, partnerships allow for staff to do more with less and to quickly evolve their workflows. Vendor services can change the type of work that is performed by allowing for the automation of rote work. The end result is a staff that can better serve the user and manage the complicated life cycle of e-resources.

For publishers and vendors, the possibilities abound. Fruitful cross-sector collaborations noted by the presenters offer advances in data management, linking, and maintenance. The aim for all of these new efficiencies or innovations is improvement to discoverability for academic researchers, culminating in search across many resources, to search on web scale.

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