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How Far Have We Come Since Our “Go Live” Dates, and Where Do We Go from Here?

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Abstract

Next-generation library systems promise new opportunities to expand beyond our existing methodologies, and there has been a surge of institutions migrating to web-based platforms as a result. Extensive research and planning goes into choosing and moving to a new integrated library system (ILS). But what happens after migration and implementation? And how closely does reality align with expectations? Individuals from three libraries who have chosen Ex Libris’s Alma as their web-based ILS solution will share their migration experiences and the challenges of working in a constantly changing environment. Strategies on transitioning from an abstract understanding to a live production site will be addressed, as well as the possibilities to collaborate in the future.

Introduction

Migrating to a new ILS will be a different experience for every institution. Some institutions will have a long migration planning period to prepare, while others may have a short turnaround time. The migration and planning stages of the California State University, Fullerton (CSUF), Getty Research Institute (GRI), and Tarrant County College (TCC) to Ex Libris’s Alma all vary, but what has been consistent is that the migrations have significantly changed workflows and will continue to change. Even those who have not yet migrated but are in the contemplation stages are re-envisioning workflows that will be constantly changing with every monthly update.

Setting the Stage

The GRI’s library is a private art history research institution located in Los Angeles, California with a user base of 1,200 FTE. The library has over a million volumes, and special collections with 75,000 rare volumes, nearly 20,000 feet of archives, 27,000 prints, and 800 collections of rare photographs. Additionally, the library has photo archives of two million study photographs. The library collections, totaling 34 miles of shelving, are located in two buildings: the GRI with 30,000

square feet and an annex, 30 miles away, with 100,000 square feet. Eighty-five percent of the materials are in closed stacks.

Tarrant County College is located in Tarrant County, Texas. It is comprised of five separate campuses: three in Fort Worth, one in Arlington, and one in Hurst, as well as other satellite campuses throughout the county. TCC has about 50,000 enrolled students each semester. There are five main libraries at TCC, with one located on each campus. There is one central technical services department that works with all of the libraries and does acquisitions, cataloging, processing, etc. The collection is comprised of print materials, e-books, periodicals, standing orders, and more.

The California State University (CSU) system is comprised of 23 campuses with a focus on teaching and CSUF is one of the larger CSU campuses, with nearly 32,000 FTE as of fall 2015. CSUF is a Hispanic-serving institution with a heavy emphasis on undergraduate education but offers a number of masters and doctoral degrees. Their collection contains over a million titles in various formats and is an electronic format preferred campus.

Preparing to Migrate and Early Issues

Although every migration will be unique, Ex Libris has a well-defined protocol for facilitating migrations: an assigned implementation team, staff webinars, site visits, and routine conference calls. Some of the protocols have been formalized as a result of the previous migrations and now also includes a migration checklist.

GRI Experience

The GRI had Ex Libris's Voyager for many years, and made the decision to be an early adopter. The GRI moved to Alma and Primo in July 2013, and shortly after that added Rosetta to their suite of Ex Libris products in the fall of 2013.

Moving to Alma was especially challenging for electronic resources, which were handled with a non-Ex Libris product, Serials Solutions. The Voyager to Alma migration was easier as they have a similar information architecture. It was assumed that the Alma Knowledge Base (KB) would have roughly the same number of records as Serials Solutions, but that was not the case. The Alma KB is growing by regularly adding collections and individual records, but its greatest strength remains in the sciences, which does not service a high research art history library.

In acquisitions, there are a number of outstanding issues to be resolved in regards to funds, ledgers, and invoicing. Cases have been submitted to Ex Libris. Post-migration, complexities arose immediately in circulation, or otherwise known as fulfillment in Alma. One of the most prominent problems was the automatic "in transit" feature in Alma. The GRI's turnaround time is fast. Items received in acquisitions are picked up by the circulation staff on the same day. Physically these two departments are fewer than 100 feet apart. The Alma workflow automatically puts the items "in transit," requiring an item to be scanned twice: once upon receipt in acquisitions and once upon arrival in circulation. Shortly after the migration, disabling this functionality was deemed as a high priority.

The GRI did not have Ex Libris migrate the image files to Rosetta, but rather it was done locally

because the file structure of the previous system, DigiTool, was an access file, and Rosetta required a master file. The Getty was the first institution of its kind to implement Rosetta.

TCC Experience

TCC as a whole migrated in August 2013, with a short turnaround for migration preparation. Preparation began in March 2013 and the migration took place on August 15, 2013, leaving little time, if any, to prepare data. TCC was set up with an Alma migration team, who established a listserv for questions. Pivotal and then Salesforce were used to document problems and issues.

One of the first items that came up in acquisitions was in regards to the training. Most of the examples and webinars were focused on the individual ordering of items. Most of all TCC's ordering is done by Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) in batches. It was also not something that was easy to duplicate in the sandbox because it is based on incoming imports and then outgoing EDIs. The most challenging part of this was trying to put into place, in Alma, a set of configuration rules that would not stop the Purchase Order Lines (POLs) from packaging and sending out the order right away without waiting. The first time it was set up, the order went into review. After completing the certification class, the migration team was better able to understand the configuration for acquisitions and worked to rectify the situation. Once EDI ordering was up and working, the acquisitions staff was able to do all the ordering in half the time that it took previously.

The concept of work order departments was new to TCC. Since all of the receiving, cataloging, and processing is done in the same area, there is not a significant need for TCC to use this functionality, and it was not adopted. In other words, once an item is received, it remains with the same status until it is taken out of in-process, which puts it "in transit" to one of the five libraries.

A learning curve that was faced right before migration was setting up the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) gateway to work with Alma. Most of the configuration was straightforward.

The challenging part was understanding how to set up the normalization rules. This was something new. Right before migrating and after some trial and error, the normalization rule was set up for the incoming records for the OCLC gateway, and it is still being used today.

CSUF Experience

CSUF will be migrating from its ILS, Innovative's Millennium, and Ex Libris' SFX and Verde for electronic resources management to Alma. The migration is a critical component in unifying the disparate systems and workflows for managing different types of resources. The CSUF migration is also marked within a larger endeavor at the CSU-wide consortial level to unify all 23 campuses spread across the state of California under a single system. The CSUs as a whole will migrate in the summer of 2017 and similar to other consortial users, the CSUs will have the added layer of the network zone (NZ) in addition to the institution and community zones. There are two CSU campuses, Sacramento and San Marcos, who are already on Alma and will need to be linked to the CSU's NZ as part of the migration. A CSU-wide Alma Sandbox has been established with logins and passwords for various user roles for everyone to explore. As part of the migration, three CSU campuses—Fresno, Northridge, and San Jose—were chosen as the "Vanguard" campuses, and they will undergo a mock Alma migration trial between the end of 2015 and early 2016 to learn system functionalities, assess workflows, and begin work on policies and guidelines for the consortium.

Some of the motivations behind migrating to a new ILS are to take advantage of a cloud-based system that would accommodate growing digital and electronic collections, revitalize workflows, and improve the opportunities to collaborate. A web-based system arrives with functionalities that will allow the CSUs to work directly in the web environment and participate in the development of next-generation library systems.

New implementations will undoubtedly learn from the experience of early adopters, and the CSU migration is no exception. The CSUs are reviewing the migration of the sister consortium in the

Pacific Northwest, the Orbis Cascade Alliance, and closely monitoring other consortial Ex Libris migrations in addition to the development of consortial features in areas such as vendor records management, consortial licensing, and consortial collections building.

Current Workflows

GRI

After the first year, the Getty's electronic resources and acquisitions are largely in order and operational. In acquisitions, the GRI has implemented some Alma-suggested workflows, but have found it easier to stay with previous workflows for serials check-in and print plus online orders. With a small staff, most tasks are assigned to one person. For example, one staff member handles all aspects of standing orders. Therefore, the task list workflow feature is not heavily used except for claiming.

As a library with 85% of the collection in two storage facilities, paging is a huge task for the Getty's circulation staff. The main storage building of 100,000 square feet is 30 miles away. Fifteen percent of the collection is in open stacks in two different physical sites: the Getty Center and the Getty Villa, which are 15 miles apart. For open stack materials, patrons are to get the volumes and check them out to themselves on OPAC self-checkout stations in the building in which they are located. Set up for patron records was complex. Circulation needed to identify where staff were located (Center or Villa) and set up their records to allow them to page from buildings they were not physically in. This took one year to resolve. From 2013–2014, patrons needed to send an e-mail to circulation to request the open stacks materials for the building in which they were not physically located. Retrieving requested books and charging them to patrons takes more time in Alma than it did in Voyager. One cannot charge a requested book out to a patron by scanning the barcode of the book and have Alma match the book to the patron's record. The circulation staff must first search for the patron's name on the printed call slip, and then scan the book to be charged out.

Introducing the Primo discovery system was a challenge. For staff who use the GRI's Ex Libris products daily, there was a short but steep learning curve. With many meetings and documenting procedures on an internal wiki, the Primo team was able to move forward and resolve issues in a systematic way. After about six months, everyone was trained and familiar with the features and limitation of the system.

As for the public, that was another story. The Getty is a specialized research library with a unique international client base who may visit for only a week or stay for years. Explaining "discovery" to the public with varying degrees of familiarity with the system was not easy. However, one of the strengths of a discovery system is to use a central index to find journal articles, including ones that the library does not own. As a developing central index, Primo does not have all the resources the Getty subscribes to. Therefore, users are only getting partial content. The nearly impossible task for the reference librarians is to explain what is in Primo and what is not. And as Primo Central Index grows, what was not there a month ago, may be available a month later. Although adding resources is a good thing, it has been difficult to predict when collections will be added, and therefore challenging to keep users up-to-date. The good news is that as Primo's index expands, the ability to reveal our rich collections will be even more helpful to researchers.

TCC

At TCC, one of the biggest changes in acquisitions was that the ISBN was used for EDI ordering. Brief machine-readable cataloging (MARC) order records are imported; then the order information is sent out through EDI to the vendor. In the past, the order would use the ISBN that was in the first 020 field on the MARC record. This meant having to sometimes manipulate the records to have the ISBN for the item being ordered in that first 020 field. It would then go into the purchase order line (POL) and be sent out on the order. At the beginning in Alma, this still happened with the option of being able to choose the ISBN in the POL to use the correct ordering, but a couple of months after TCC went to Alma, and a Salesforce case later, this changed. The Alma developers

were able to have a way for TCC to directly map the ISBN from the incoming order record to the POL. This meant that TCC did not need to re-lay on the 020 fields. The ISBN of the ordered item went to a different field on the MARC record, and was then mapped in Alma directly to the POL identifier. This meant that the ordered item's ISBN, from the vendor, sent out within the EDI, without any additional work from acquisitions. Thus saving the acquisitions department a lot of time. There have now been more fields that are able to be mapped, saving even more processing time of items.

In cataloging, there have also been some time savers. TCC sometimes has to relink items. If the items are in process, then Alma does not allow relinking of the holdings. But on the item record itself it is now possible to change the process type on the items to make them available and able to be relinked. Also more recently Alma now added a way to merge records in the metadata editor.

Moving Forward

Cultural Shift or at Least Acceptance

As evidenced in the examples above, migrating to a new system will present new and exciting challenges, but there needs to be staff buy-in, or at least acceptance of the changes that will occur. A new and unfamiliar system will require training, willingness to reassess workflows, and troubleshooting abilities. Empowering everyone to ask questions and become involved is an expensive undertaking from an operations point of view, but a necessary process to create a smooth transition. A new system might result in a whole new set of duties or a change to a colleague's portfolio of responsibilities. Having everyone on the same page through open and clear channels of communication minimizes the confusion and stress during and after migration.

One of the harsh realities of working in a system that is in development is that not every desired feature will be available, but Alma users can submit enhancement requests for nonexistent functionalities. There may be other instances when a button's functionality or potential is not obvious; for example, in the electronic collection

records, the “current” or “perpetual” access type radio buttons showed up unexpectedly early in 2015. Although it is obvious what the purpose of these buttons is within the context of electronic collection records, there were local discussions as to why this functionality surfaced as a new button and how it relates to the type of information contained in license records.

Monthly Updates

The most noticeable change with Alma is that there are monthly updates. Although the systematic updates reduce the work of systems staff who have traditionally maintained the local ILS, the work now is decentralized to staff working in the functional areas to check the monthly Alma release notes for anything that would affect existing processes. Sometimes there is nothing but other times the changes can be significant. It is important to stay up-to-date with the changes and enhancements to keep surprises to a minimum. Occasionally, staff might encounter unexpected changes rolled out into the production site prematurely. In the spring of 2015, there were a number major changes with electronic collection records and the handling of license records that surfaced in production before their scheduled monthly release. Although this was a nice preview of what was in store for the upcoming release, it was a timely reminder that the system is constantly changing.

Reviewing Existing Workflows and Configurations

Sometimes it is not enough to simply keep up with the updates but routinely review existing workflows and local configurations. It is hard to see the bigger picture of Ex Libris’ direction when the changes happen incrementally over time. Or in larger institutions with compartmentalized units responsible for a fraction of the entire workflow, changes in the system might go unnoticed, perpetuating outdated workflows that are not optimizing the system or the institution for efficiency. Alma changes and is dynamic. Maintaining the status quo would not take advantage of all Alma has to offer. Staying abreast of developments in the system, understanding the changes in relation to existing functionalities, and

vigilance with regard to workflows will offer a more holistic view in identifying local strategies for institutional needs.

Problem With Documentation

It is challenging to document workflows in a system that is changing regularly. Ex Libris’s documentation is naturally changing as well because the system is changing. Alma’s flexibility in allowing many different ways of performing the same task or function makes it even more difficult to document workflows. For instance, a patron hold can be placed on an item through the purchase order line, or through the inventory; depending on how the hold request was initiated, a hold request can be created in more than one functional area. One method of overcoming the constant need to update documentation is to rely on Ex Libris’s step-by-step documentation, if available, and locally document the reasons as to why a particular decision was made. Providing the framework to guide the work at the macro level might sometimes be necessary over detailed instructions.

Working Collaboratively and the Benefits

As consumers, there is a vested interest in the development of the product. User engagement benefits not only the vendor but also the users in the long run, and as such, Alma users become involved with the development process. There are many ways to participate through groups such as the International Group of Ex Libris Users (IGeLU) or Ex Libris Users of North America (ELUNA) that coordinate the product enhancement cycles and meet annually.

Working at a small institution where one person might carry out all technical services functions, learning from one’s counterparts in other organizations becomes necessary to carry out tasks. Connecting with other institutions regarding Alma is often facilitated through the listservs. In addition to user groups, conferences, and listservs, one may partake in topical, local, consortial or regional meetings to network with others utilizing the same vendor’s ILS. It might even be desirable to learn about other ILS developments and see what benefits those systems possess and offer. There is no shortage of

venues and opportunities to work with colleagues, but the important thread is to continue working together to innovate and improve the systems to ultimately better serve our users.

Future

Once a library is up and running for about six months, most staff are up to speed, migration issues are addressed, and life becomes more manageable. Issues that do arise are submitted using the case reporting function, or the library identifies internal solutions. System upgrades are monthly with documentation available well in advance. Alma and Primo Central Index updates are posted regularly. Daily issues are discussed on the listservs, and the Ex Libris client phone conferences decrease over time.

As the number of libraries that are now on Alma increases, it is possible to learn of different

institutional practices and processes. This has meant a lot more sharing of resources and hearing about different experiments or outcomes without having to test out the entire monthly release by oneself. Alma is a different Alma from the time of the early adopters' migrations to now, having gone through numerous updates. Although there are still areas that are being developed and enhanced, there have been noted improvements over its initial release. Many users have cited cases where Alma has improved efficiency in some areas and as Alma continues to mature, more improvements will be documented. The overall good news is that there have been a lot of changes with Alma since its inception, and it is constantly getting better with every new monthly release. The future road map also looks very bright and promising because of the dedication of the users deeply invested in improving this system.