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Kent State University Libraries Develops a New System for Resource Selection

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Abstract:

The presentation will describe the creation and implementation of Kent State University's new centralized system for managing communications and workflow related to the review, selection and acquisition of electronic resources. This system provides selectors with price and trial information, tracks the review process, and compiles review scores and product commentary. It is an automated system for initiating and managing technical services workflow with regard to preliminary product research and price quotes; it automates communications for vendor price requests; and, it dispenses product and trial information to targeted selectors. The primary advantages of the system are: 1) it reclaims costly staff time by streamlining workflow and eliminating inefficient email communication, 2) it applies a standard method of coordinating the discovery, review and selection of new resources, and 3) it provides a record of past reviews to help prioritize resources for future purchases.

What is Pre-ILS? Pre-ILS is a centralized system that manages the communication and workflow related to the review and selection of electronic resources before records are created in the integrated library system (ILS). This presentation describes a general overview of a system that manages the library collections activity that happens before library resources are entered in to the acquisitions workflow. This paper describes why Pre-ILS is necessary, what it can do to help manage the selection process, and its development, current use and future plans.

Selection for electronic resources differs from selection for print resources in that it is more complex, includes more variables, and involves more individuals. Although it may appear simple on the surface, the process itself is multidimensional. Many aspects can divert the process so that selection events do not always follow a linear path. For example, complicated license negotiations may prolong or stall acquisition; decisions pending at the OhioLINK consortia level may influence consideration for Kent State University purchases.

New online resources are identified through a variety of sources such as reviews, bibliographic references, professional contacts, library catalogs, subject experts, consortia initiatives, content providers, marketing communications, faculty, students, and others. Generally the review and product research process begins when the collection manager or acquisition librarian receives a request for pricing or a trial. These processes typically result in lots of email to lots of stakeholders in lots of email in-boxes.
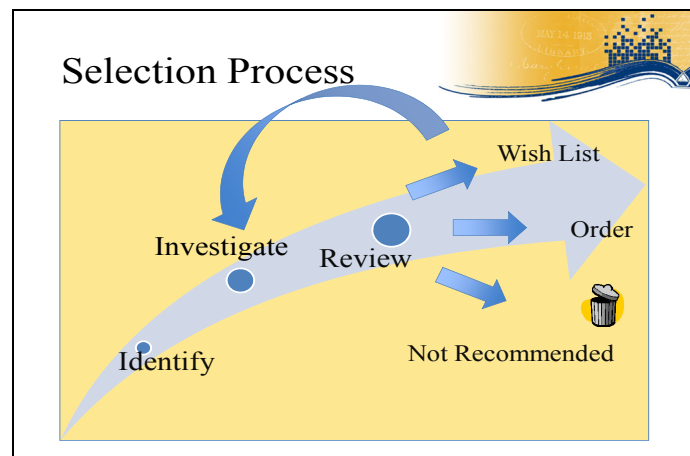
The number of stakeholders also adds layers of complication to the selection process in the electronic environment. Some stakeholders are internal to the library such as subject librarians, regional campus librarians, collection managers, acquisition librarians, and electronic resources librarians. External stakeholders include sales representatives, consortia participants, publishers, content providers, faculty and students. Nearly all communication in these processes is conducted via email. While the extent and complexity of communications between these individuals depends entirely upon the size of the institution, the management and workflow structure, and the number of selectors, one common theme generally emerges among the staff—too much email that takes too much effort to manage in the review and selection process.

At Kent State University, technical services librarians are charged with investigating product costs and contract details. They communicate with content providers to obtain product information and pricing options. They also schedule trials, review license restrictions, determine archiving rights and examine platform options. This process is time consuming and may take months and sometimes longer to conclude, again, with most relevant notes usually being committed to more and more email.

Selectors are responsible for evaluating the resource to determine whether or not it fills a collection need and provides appropriate support for research and teaching. They evaluate the resource on factors like authority, usability, accreditation requirements, search features and indexing, with their recommendations usually travelling to the technical services staff via more email.

Upon recommendation, collection managers evaluate the resource within the context of collection policy and other collection building activity. They determine whether or not it provides support for institutional strategic priorities; they make contract decisions, identify funding, and finally approve the purchase.

Until now, a number of systems have been used to manage these events. Examples of these include, email folders, ERMs, ILS acquisitions modules, spreadsheets, ticketing systems, and paper work

forms. These systems are often used alone or in combination to manage the process, but—because the information is distributed across disparate systems—collating and communicating the information to all stakeholders is problematic and time consuming. As there are so many stakeholders and too many product variables, there is most often too much email and too much redundant activity. Current management tools are inefficient and provide many opportunities for mistakes. Recognizing this, librarians at Kent State University Libraries developed a system that could coordinate and control information requests for new online resources, as well as manage the selection process and the technical services workflow.

In May of 2010, Tom Klingler (Assistant Dean for Systems and Technical Services,) Rick Wiggins (Program Developer,) and Kay Downey (Collection Management Librarian,) began a series of whiteboard meetings to design the system. We created a model for a central system that could communicate product pricing and trial requests from the subject librarians, initiate acquisitions workflow, and track the entire process from inquiry through purchase. It also would store reviewers' comments and scores and provide historical records of previous reviews. The system would provide transparency in the selection process not only for librarians but also to stakeholders external to the library. The system would also provide a standard and framework for selection practices. Following the whiteboard sessions we drafted the technical specifications and wrote the program. By winter of 2010, we began testing the system with technical services librarians and subject librarians. In the spring of 2011, we worked with faculty in the School of Library and Information Science to run usability studies on the system. By summer, we were in production for internal use on our staff intranet. Today the public access view has been developed and is in final testing.

Selectors use the Pre-ILS request form to make a price request, request a trial or recommend a new purchase. Once the request has been submitted, they begin to receive email notifications when any action is taken on the request, for example, when trial access is arranged and/or price information is updated. The request is then assigned by manage-

ment to an individual in the technical services department who will use the Pre-ILS tools to generate correspondence for vendor price inquiries, and then enter the required collections data, price quotes and license specifications into the request record. The system also provides a reviewing tool for selectors that includes scoring and comment fields. Scores and comments will be available for review in the public interface for all university constituents. If the resource is recommended for purchase, collection management enters the funding information in the request record and from there approves the order. Once a purchase is approved, the Pre-ILS can export data to the ILS to create brief bibliographic, order and ERM resource records.

The Pre-ILS was developed on an intranet that provides a central location for University Library (UL) employees to find documentation, procedures, and other custom web-based applications. It is coded primarily in the PHP and JavaScript scripting languages and uses MySQL for database storage. The UL public web site is managed using these applications and a custom-built content management system. The Pre-ILS application consists of both an intranet application and a public web site application which share 39 database tables specifically created for the application. Both the intranet and the public web site use the University's online (LDAP) directory to authenticate students, staff, and faculty. While these two applications work similarly, they provide different levels of information for the different target audiences. For example, library staff get access to detailed workflow, authenticated faculty and students can submit comments and reviews on the public view, and the general public has view-only access to items under consideration. Many aspects of the Pre-ILS are Kent State-specific. For example, Kent State has eight campuses, which can be represented individually or in any combination in the Pre-ILS. The workflows encoded in the application are specifically those which our Technical Services Department uses. These aspects of the application are hard-coded and cannot be configured. So, while we cannot easily give it away, we nevertheless think that the system demonstrates a vision for a valuable module that the ILS vendors so far have not developed.

Everything about the system is status based. Each request record in the Pre-ILS has a status. The status begins with '*New Request'* and is updated as information is added or target dates are reached. Status changes are logged with the action date and the person responsible for the status change. Each status change prompts the system to generate an automated email which is sent to any combination of users (requestor, serials staff, subject librarians, and system administrators). A maintenance script is automatically run each morning to update requests which have reached a target date.

The system includes a number of basic search and sort options. Users may search on record number, title, publisher, subject, resource type, request status and task assignment. Search results can be sorted by any field, except subject, and all fields link to the resource record.

The Pre-ILS has a 'My Stuff' folder so that individuals can set up email notifications to alert themselves to status changes for designated resources. My Stuff folders are automatically updated to include self-generated resource requests, and users can select any resource to be added to their "My Stuff" folder.

Access is defined by five different user levels. The minimum user level with view-only access rights is the public user not authenticated via the university online directory. The next level includes all those authenticated via the university online directory, including all students, faculty and staff; these users can make new requests and add review comments and scores. Level three includes UL faculty and staff, subject librarians, regional campus library directors and regional campus library faculty; they can view price quotes and other resource details not accessible to lower level users. Level four includes technical services librarians and support staff, who have access to workflow and editing features. Level five includes the assistant dean, the collection management librarian, department heads and systems developers; they can approve purchase decisions and have full access to all system capabilities.

The Pre-ILS request record components include general request information, license information, trial information, price quote information, status log, internal notes, scores and comments. Pre-ILS

resource request record fields are completed by technical services librarians who check the request against existing local and consortial holdings before proceeding with the price and trial request. The electronic resources librarian takes a preliminary look at the license to determine whether or not it is negotiable and to find out if we already have a license on file for that provider. The system includes a form template that technical services librarian can use to generate a price request email to the provider. It includes the typical information the vendor will need to know in order to provide the quote as well as a checklist of questions that we may have for the vendor. The system sends email to the technical services librarian handling the request so it can be edited before it is sent on to the provider. This tool provides the technical services librarian with a standard format for correspondence.

Message:

Marysmithy@subscriptionsunlimitedcom

Dear Mary Smith,

I am writing on behalf of Kent State University Libraries to request a price quote and product information for the "African American Newspaper Database Online"

We need pricing for online access only for all of our campuses (FTE = 31,505): $_____

Please supply the following information if applicable:

- Does a subscription include access to backfiles? If so, what are the dates of coverage?
- Is this title part of a package? If so, what are the other titles in the package?
- Do we own the content for the years paid or is access to the content lost upon subscription cancellation?
- Is access available by IP address or by username/password only?
- What discounts are available for educational institutions or for OhioLINK membership?
- If a license agreement is required please send a copy for our review

As part of our review we would also like to schedule a 30-day, campus-wide trial beginning on June 20, 2011 Our IP range is 1234567**

Thank you kindly for your assistance. Please contact me if you have questions or need further information

Sincerely,
Kay Downey
mdowney1@kentedu

While the system does generate a fair amount of email, a key factor is that this email can be deleted once the appropriate action has been taken on the Pre-ILS. The email does not have to be saved and mined in the future. Instead, all key information is entered into the Pre-ILS where it is stored once and available to all staff with the proper access rights.

Once the price quote is received from the provider, technical services staff record pricing information in the system, including a separate price quote for each price option. A number of pricing fields are included so that the charges and price options can be itemized. Each quote includes information about the type of purchase (annual subscription, one time purchase, MARC record provision, archive fee, membership fee, hosting fee), quote date, expiration date, quoted price, simultaneous user limit, subscription coverage, lease/purchase detail, local/consortia origin, provider contact information, fund assignments and transfers, and notes on which campuses would have access.

Price Quote Information

	Quoted:	Coverage:	Simultaneous Users:	Vendor Price:	Fund Charge:	Generate Vendor Email:	Purchase Option:
ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION	10/17/2011		Unlimited	$843.00	$1,053.75*	[+]	☑
Lease, Local							
Kent			Sxxxxx Dxxxx Jxxx 1 800 555 1234 KentSt@				

OHIOLINK EJC holdings 1995-2006 only (b26258948)

Permanent Fund Transfers

From:	To:	Amount:	Notes:
Iscim	Iscis	$1,053.75	for subscription 2011 going forward
	TOTAL:	$1,053.75	

Fund Assignments:	Percent:	Notes:
Iscis	100%	

	Quoted:	Coverage:	Simultaneous Users:	Vendor Price:	Fund Charge:	Generate Vendor Email:	Purchase Option:
ARCHIVE	10/17/2011	per year	Unlimited	$937.00	$937.00	[+]	☐
Purchase, Local							
Kent			Sxxxxx Dxxxx Jxxx 1 800 555 1234 KentSt@				

[Send Requestor Email] [Recommend] [Approve] [Suspend] [Decline]

* Indicates 125% of quoted price.

Subject librarians and library faculty have full access to the scores and comments section. An algorithm computes the scores for each campus and an aggregate score for Kent's entire eight campus system. Individual personal scores are computed by taking the average of the total individual scores from the work form. Individual campus scores are computed by taking the median for all of the individual average scores by campus. An eight-campus score is also calculated by taking the median of all individual average scores. The scoring feature standardizes the review process and helps us determine purchasing priorities.

Although the final, public phase of the Pre-ILS is just shy of deployment, the system has already provided the benefits of tracking selection, providing consistent communications to the stakeholders, and providing a central location so that all stakeholders have access to current information about the resources under consideration for purchase.

Staff export functions and reporting features are currently in development. The export feature should be deployed before this paper goes to press. This feature transfers data from the pre-ILS to our ILS upon purchase approval, builds a brief bibliographic record, order record and ERM record, and then suppresses Pre-ILS data from public view. The last phase of the project is to develop a reporting feature which will help us analyze the resources and processes. Forthcoming reports will include price comparisons, historical data reports, score details, score comparisons (which can help determine purchasing priorities) and customized reports by selected fields.

Please contact any of the following individuals for more information or questions about Kent State Pre-ILS:

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Reference

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