

Integrated Library System Selection Plan for a Small Academic Library

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TABLE OF CONTENTS:

INTRODUCTION 1

RECOMMENDED SELECTION CRITERIA..... 2

 Technical Services 2

 Circulation..... 2

 User Services/OPAC Interface 2

 General Considerations Not Specific to This Institution..... 2

SELECTED SYSTEMS FOR FURTHER STUDY 3

 SirsiDynix Symphony 3

 Ex Libris Voyager and Aleph..... 3

 Millenium ILS..... 3

 Koha 4

STEPS TO FINAL DECISION..... 5

 1. Needs Assesment and First Round of Potential Systems 5

 2. Staff Committee 5

 3. Site Visits and Demos 5

 4. RFP 5

 5. Contract Negotiation 5

 6. Installation and Data Migration..... 6

 7. Staff Training 6

 8. Usability Testing 6

 9. Final Implementation/User Interface Introduced to Patrons 6

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES 7

 Websites 7

 Books and Articles..... 7

INTRODUCTION

Selecting a new integrated library system (ILS) requires attention to both the “back end” (technical services) and “front end” (public/user services). Each is important and must be considered carefully, but our primary goal with this selection process is to find the product or products that will provide the best user experience for our patrons.

As a small academic library with a relatively small physical collection including a large number of archival and special collections materials, and a high proportion of digitized and “born digital” materials, such user features as the web-based OPAC interface, the ability to integrate digital content (databases, etc.) as well as our own digitized materials into the OPAC, and ability to search and display material from other library catalogs (especially for ILL purposes) will be key to our selection of a new ILS.

RECOMMENDED SELECTION CRITERIA

Initial research has led to the following selection criteria as “must haves” or at least “things that must be considered” for this search:

Technical Services/Cataloging

- Assess current data/conversion needs for purposes of data migration.
- Z39.50 support for harvesting of catalog records, among other uses.
- Support for EAD (encoded archival description), OAI (Open Archives Initiative), and integration of CONTENTdm due to our large archival collection.
- Acquisitions and serials modules available.

Circulation

- Ease of use/speed for patron.
- Support for self-checkout kiosks.
- Robust reporting features.

User Services/OPAC Interface

- Availability of integrated user interface enhancements (possibly including Web 2.0 features) or compatibility with third-party products such as AquaBrowser.
- User reservation materials via web-based OPAC.
- Possibility of a web portal/content management system.
- Seamless database/digital content integration.

General Considerations Not Specific to This Institution

- Stability of product.
- Stability/viability of provider.
- Stability of hosting environment (if we choose a vendor-hosted Software as a Service package).
- Number of simultaneous users.
- Scalability.
- Vendor relationship and support.

SELECTED SYSTEMS FOR FURTHER STUDY

SirsiDynix Symphony

There is perhaps something to be said for ubiquity. Since the 2005 merger of Sirsi and Dynix, SirsiDynix <<http://www.sirsidynix.com/>> has been the largest provider of ILS packages, and their large user base ensures that someone somewhere has probably had (and hopefully solved) whatever problem we might have. It also seems likely that this industry giant will be around for the foreseeable future.

Symphony offers all the usual optional modules, including circulation, serials, acquisitions, and cataloging. Also promoted in its literature are the APIs (application programming interfaces) and industry standard compliance that allow for integration with third-party systems, including user interfaces like AquaBrowser, and other products. There is a single back-end (staff) client. The user interface/OPAC options are not as thoroughly discussed on the vendor's website, which could be a concern. There is Z39.50 and OAI support available, as well as proprietary ERM (electronic resource management), self-checkout and reference tracking.

ARL-affiliated libraries using the related Unicorn system include Brigham Young, Emory, North Carolina State, Rutgers, and the University of Southern California.

Ex Libris Voyager and Aleph

Ex Libris Voyager and Aleph <<http://www.exlibrisgroup.com/>> target their marketing toward academic libraries and particularly emphasize their support for digital collections. Ex Libris is backed by a Northern California venture capital firm, which merged it with Endeavour Information Systems in 2006, resulting in the two distinct ILS products. The merged company has pledged to continue support for both "for the foreseeable future" according to Marshall Breeding.

Both packages offer the standard modules for serials, circulation, and cataloging. There is a proprietary ERM add-on as well as an available link resolver, a digital asset manager (which is probably irrelevant if we're using CONTENTdm), a Z39.50/OAI harvesting module, and the Primo user interface; Aleph and Voyager are also both compatible with AquaBrowser. A digital preservation module is available as well.

ARL-affiliated libraries using Voyager include Columbia, Cornell, Georgia Tech, Princeton, UCLA, Pitt, and Yale. Duke, MIT, NEW YORK University, Notre Dame and others use Aleph.

Millennium ILS

Millennium ILS <http://www.iii.com/products/millennium_ils.shtml> is a product of Innovative Interfaces, the third largest ILS technology firm in 2007.

Millenium includes a serials module for back-end management as well as an ERM module for display. There are also available cataloging, acquisitions, and circulation modules, as well as a module to manage public/student computer workstations. Additionally a wireless RFID inventory and circulation module is available. Millenium also offers Encore, a Web 2.0 enabled end user interface, which integrates its federated database search and ERM modules. There is also support for reference tracking and self-checkout stations. AquaBrowser is also compatible with Millenium. Z39.50 and OAI support are available as add-ons.

ARL-affiliated libraries using Millenium include Arizona State, Boston University, Brown, Georgetown, Ohio State, UC Berkeley, UNC Chapel Hill, and The University of Texas at Austin.

Koha

Open source software, such as Koha <<http://koha.org/>>, offers advantages and disadvantages, but is worth considering as an option, particularly for a smaller academic library. The primary advantage, of course, is cost, assuming that the library handles its own maintenance and support. With open-source products, there tends to be a large and enthusiastic community of users and developers providing a significant amount of free advice and free code. However, there is usually no single and authoritative voice. It is possible, though, to purchase support services or even enhanced versions of the product from a vendor; in the case of Koha, one of the biggest providers, LibLime <<http://www.liblime.com/>>, is also a major contributor to the project. Just this week, LibLime announced the release of LibLime Enterprise Koha, a Software as a Service (formerly ASP) version of Koha, hosted on their own servers: <<http://www.liblime.com/news/liblime-announces-liblime-enterprise-koha>>.

An additional benefit stated by many is that open-source products offer easier and more enhanced customization options than commercial products, since the code is freely available to any developer who wants it. Also, the future of an open source product may not be as subject to marketplace factors (mergers, acquisitions, bankruptcies, etc.) as some commercial products.

Koha offers a standard set of features including circulation, cataloging with integrated Z39.50 and OAI support, acquisitions, and a serials system. As such, it seems to be somewhat more fully developed than Evergreen, another popular open source product. Koha is compatible with AquaBrowser.

No ARL members are currently using Koha, according the database at librarytechnology.org. The product seems to be more common at small colleges and within specific departmental libraries of larger ones.

STEPS TO FINAL DECISION

1. Needs Assessment and First Round of Potential Systems

An initial needs assessment was conducted prior to the completion of this plan. Each department was asked to present a list of “must have” and “preferred” items. In addition, department heads were asked to complete a report on what aspects of the current system that their department staff liked and disliked. These reports were used in the selection of the systems for further study noted above.

2. Staff Committee

Now that the list of systems for further study has been compiled, staff input will again be solicited in the form of a committee comprised of one staff member each from cataloging, serials, circulation, administration, reference, and archives, plus the library’s web developer, digital projects coordinator, and IT director. Committee members will be responsible for soliciting input from their own departments. I will provide expanded vendor information packets at this point.

The committee will then do further research, to include:

- Checking vendor references.
- Completing a more thorough literature review.
- Making calls to the vendor’s tech support line.
- Doing online searches for feedback on vendors.

The result will be a ranking each package based on the recommended selection criteria set out above.

3. Site Visits and Demos

The committee chair will then arrange (or delegate the arrangement of) site visits and product demos for each of the systems under study, assuming one or more local institutions using each product can be found.

4. RFP

Once the site visits, demos, and research are completed, any unsuitable vendors/products will be weeded from the list, and requests for proposals (RFPs) will be sent to the remaining vendors. The committee will determine the format for the RFP, which will probably involve modifying an existing document available online. The committee will further be charged with analyzing the completed RFPs and making the final vendor choice, at which point contract negotiations can begin.

5. Contract Negotiation

Contract negotiation will be handled by library administration in consultation with the IT department.

6. Installation and Data Migration

Installation and data migration will involve primarily the vendor and representatives from serials, cataloging, and IT and. It is assumed that the current system will remain active and available to allow time for staff training. A contingency plan for synchronizing data during the time both systems are operational will need to be devised. The vendor will most likely have such a plan in place, or at least will be able to offer advice.

7. Staff Training

Staff training is essential, and will be the highest priority after installation. The recommended approach is to have one "expert" in each department who is thoroughly trained on all modules that are relevant to his/her department and also has received a "big picture" orientation to the package. Other staff members will receive slightly less intensive training and will be able to rely on their departmental expert for additional first line local support.

8. OPAC/Interface Usability Testing

Usability testing of the end user (e.g. web-based OPAC, etc.) interface will also be essential, whether we opt for an interface integrated with the ILS or for a third party product. If possible, some usability testing at the demo stage would be ideal, but testing of the final interface to be implemented must occur before the interface goes live. This could be completed by a consultant or perhaps within the university's own academic departments.

Live testing of the circulation module should, of course, occur during an "off" period such as a holiday or break.

9. Final Implementation/User Interface Introduced to Patrons

It's the last step in the plan, but really should be looked at as the first one. Ongoing training will be essential; once the system is in place, there will still be issues and learning curves our implementation plan will have to address.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

In addition to the vendor websites and other resources linked above, the following may also be useful when considering the selection of our ILS:

Websites

Library Technology Guides <<http://www.librarytechnology.org/>>, maintained by Marshall Breeding of Vanderbilt University provides press releases, reviews, and a database of ILS installations.

WebJunction <<http://www.webjunction.org/ils>>, maintained by OCLC, includes an overview and guide to ILS resources, including the particularly helpful paper by Ellyssa Kroski cited below.

Books and Articles

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