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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 Ex Libris 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
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 item requires the creation of an item record. This record structure varies from other systems, like III's Millenium, 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 hypen." 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 journal 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 Bordelianu (University of Mexico) <sebo@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