WorldCat Selection: A Shorter, Smoother Path from Selection to User Access

Kay Covert
OCLC Marketing, covertk@oclc.org

Brad Gauder
OCLC Marketing, gauderb@oclc.org

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WorldCat Selection: A Shorter, Smoother Path from Selection to User Access

by Kay Covert (OCLC Marketing) <covertk@oclc.org> and Brad Gauder (OCLC Marketing) <gauderb@oclc.org>

Paper slips that pile up or get misplaced—searching multiple vendor sites over and over—lacking information on what other libraries own—for many libraries, these conditions characterize their selection and acquisition processes.

Thanks to a software development project initiated at Cornell University Library in Ithaca, New York, and developed further by OCLC, libraries now have a way to modernize and streamline those often tedious selection and acquisitions duties. It’s called WorldCat Selection, and it’s available to libraries of any size or type.

Several years ago, staff at the Cornell University Library undertook a software development project to help streamline the labor-intensive selection and ordering process—and reduce the inefficiency inherent in learning and using multiple online systems. The result was the Integrated Tool for Selection and Ordering at Cornell University Library, or “ITSO CUL.”

The goals of ITSO CUL were to assist library staff with the selection and ordering process; and bring together into one interface new publication records from materials vendors, the library’s profile and MARC records from the Library of Congress. In 2006, Cornell began working with a team from OCLC to further the development of ITSO CUL, and late that year, OCLC introduced WorldCat Selection.

“Paper Shuffling that Took Too Much Time”

The challenges inherent in a paper-based system for the selections and acquisitions were largely behind decisions that the McGill University library system and the Getty Research Institute (GRI), Research Library in Los Angeles made to implement WorldCat Selection.

McGill University, based in Montréal, has 13 libraries in its system, and Joseph Hafner, Associate Director, Collection Services, would be among the first to admit that a 13-library system can generate a lot of paper slips in selection and acquisition workflows.

“We were using several vendors — and were still receiving paper slips from our European vendors,” explains Hafner. “These slips had to be sorted to determine the selection and ordering at Cornell University Library, and Ordering at Cornell University Library was the labor-intensive selection and ordering process.

4. We must largely (though not completely) let go of our boutique model of both collecting and preserving. It’s easy to leaf through a publisher’s catalog and find titles that look interesting. It’s easy to decide that the damaged book I see in front of me right now deserves to be repaired. It’s hard even to comprehend, let alone honestly confront, the huge and growing opportunity cost imposed by directing time to those activities.

I realize that this whole column tends to conflates the issues of preservation and collection development. But that’s partly because the connection between them is so intimate. Preservation is basically the enforcement arm of collection development — it’s the mechanism by which we make our collecting decisions stick. Decisions about collection development are necessarily preservation decisions, and vice versa.

I also realize that I haven’t exactly proposed a real solution to the problem of preservation in an environment of overwhelmingly explosive information growth. Ultimately, there may not be a solution. We may eventually have to let go of the whole idea of the library as a permanent repository, and flip the traditional collection model: instead of investing primarily in permanent collections, focus more on providing an effective portal to everything that’s available at a given moment. Not even the Library of Congress can handle everything that it really ought to. Why do we continue pretending that it — let alone the rest of us — can? 😳

Endnotes


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“WorldCat Selection allows selectors of new library materials to view notification records from multiple vendors in one central comprehensive system. The service makes it easier for libraries to get WorldCat records for newly selected materials into their integrated library system earlier in the technical services process.”

Hafner says that centralization was key to McGill’s decision to implement WorldCat Selection. At McGill, some selectors use just one vendor, but those who select for subjects like law, medicine and international economics order from multiple vendors, and history selectors use all of McGill’s materials vendors. “WorldCat Selection offered an opportunity to centralize everything into one net,” he says.

“Our librarians told us they’d like to have just one source to search, and now they can move electronic slips easily. Also, library holdings information is accessible in WorldCat Selection, so it’s easy to see what libraries already own materials that McGill wants to buy,” Hafner explains.

It was the estimated time savings for McGill’s acquisitions team that ultimately sold the library’s director and associate directors on WorldCat Selection. According to Hafner, the decision also involved input from the head of cataloging, a selector coordinator, an acquisitions coordinator, a senior liaison librarian and a systems librarian.

Roll says that the Research Library at the GRI chose WorldCat Selection to streamline both the selection and firm order processes. This ensures that the slips are reviewed and enables acquisitions staff to place orders faster.

It also allows the slips to be distributed to more than one bibliographer. “This has worked very well for the bibliographer for our Conservation Collection, which has very interdisciplinary and esoteric content,” notes Roll.

Princeton’s Farrell notes that when she first learned about WorldCat Selection, she thought to herself, “Wow, that’s what I’ve had in mind for a long time.”

Farrell believes that WorldCat Selection, with the LC resource file, is a smart choice for a large research library like Princeton’s because it enables library staff to see available items that are unavailable through their major vendors. “In an average week we place a couple of hundred orders through LC resource files that are completely outside the net of our current vendors,” she says.

While the need to send items via paper slips or select items in multiple vendor systems is eliminated with WorldCat Selection, libraries retain control of the selection process. The service also accommodates the export of MARC records from WorldCat into integrated library systems, eliminating the need to search and rekey data one record at a time or import data from multiple vendors.

Farrell notes that WorldCat Selection helps Princeton accomplish its goal of ‘grabbing the best record as early as possible’ in the technical services workflow. Acquisitions staff can take these records and put them into the acquisitions system to place electronic orders more efficiently.

“Pretty Straightforward” Implementation

Roll, Farrell and Hafner all report smooth implementations of WorldCat Selection, aided by training opportunities and ongoing support. At the Research Library at the GRI, two training sessions helped prepare the selectors to use the service. Authorization set-up was also part of the start-up there.

“In setting up the authorizations, we first followed the model that we have used for reviewing approval books, matching each language-specific vendor to a single selector,” says Roll. “As we continued, we took greater advantage of the distribution features [in WorldCat Selection] and created more authorizations with more specific criteria.”

When Princeton implemented WorldCat Selection in August 2007, it “shut off” its use of paper slips, according to Farrell. “Even though OCLC’s online documentation is very well-done, helpful and context-sensitive, we still had lots of questions,” she says. “Our contacts at OCLC were all very responsive to these questions.”

Hafner reports that McGill’s implementation in spring 2008 didn’t take much time to set up and was “pretty straightforward.” McGill held a one-hour training session using the online WorldCat Selection tutorial for its liaison librarians whose vendor data was available in the service at implementation. According to Hafner, this training will be repeated for appropriate staff as the vendors they use are added to McGill’s implementation of WorldCat Selection.

“Closer to the Front of the Line”

Institutions including Princeton, the Research Library at the GRI and McGill are realizing significant efficiencies and cost savings through their use of WorldCat Selection without having to rethink their selection and acquisitions processes.

According to Farrell, Princeton’s 30 or so selectors agree that WorldCat Selection speeds workflows significantly. “Even our selectors for our humanities collections, who managed paper slips quite efficiently, have agreed that Selection makes things go faster overall.

“A few of our selectors have noted that WorldCat Selection makes it impossible to let orders pile up because otherwise, they clog up your inbox. They are no longer sorting paper and having it pile up — and we’re saving money because it used to take half an FTE to sort the paper slips.”

Roll notes that at the Research Library at the GRI the notification records are being reviewed more often, which enables their collection development team to refine their vendor profiles. “It also ensures that we’re not missing titles that would have come on our approval plans prior to the dollar’s fall.”

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ATG: Tell us about the Sage Colleges. There are three of them I believe. How many libraries?

KG: The Sage Colleges is a complex institution, offering degrees from associates thru the doctoral level to 2000 students, enrolled in four colleges on two campuses in Albany and Troy, NY. The colleges are Russell Sage College for Women, Sage College of Albany, Sage Graduate School, and Sage After Work. The latter three are coed. We have a library on each campus.

ATG: Tell us about the library(ies). Number of items? Electronic resources? Budget? Staff?

KG: The Libraries are considered one unit with two service points. The holdings are around 175 thousand volumes. We offer dozens of databases, and some 50 thousand electronic subscriptions. The overall budget is $1.5 million. The staff is comprised of nine FTE librarians (eight w/ faculty status), two paraprofessional, ten hourly staff, and 20-25 student assistants. The libraries are open a combined 172 hours per week.

ATG: You attend the Charleston Conference regularly. How will you attend this year?

KG: The budget for administrative travel was eliminated this year, so I’ll miss Charleston this time around.

ATG: Tell us about yourself, background and education? I know that you went to Dickinson College and majored in Geology and History.


ATG: We are intrigued by your “furniture” of books. We understand that you are a furniture/antique collector as well?

KG: I don’t collect furniture; I restore it. I have had a side business doing that since 1980. I saw a photo in LJ a few years ago of some furniture made out of books in a library in the Midwest (Kansas City?). A couple of days later, I walked by our mothballed NUC set, and a light bulb went off: what perfect building blocks! 800-some volumes, all the same size and color! Soon after, I set about building loveseats in each building. The line also includes coffee and end tables (Books sitting on wooden legs). The volumes in the loveseats and coffee tables are held in place with 2-sided tape. The end tables stay together with hanger bolts and cap nuts thru 1/4” holes in the corners of the volumes. Like any building project, you have to improvise, so other withdrawn books are fitted in where necessary. We’ve gotten a lot of positive feedback from members of the college community on the NUC furniture. I am available for consultation on making furniture out of books.

ATG: What are your other hobbies/whatever?

KG: My wife of 35 years and I have a cottage in the 1000 Islands (St. Lawrence River), where I play golf, fish and putter. We live 20 miles south of Albany in an 1882 farmhouse on 3+ acres, where I ply my furniture restoration business, grow vegetables, and try to keep the house from falling down. I also have a 1910 Brunswick pool table, which I enjoy playing on when it’s not covered with stuff.

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At McGill, it’s too soon for a fair assessment of cost and time savings since implementation was recent, but Hafner anticipates these savings will be realized. WorldCat Selection is freeing up time for McGill’s acquisitions staff who no longer need to rekey and search for records again, because that part of the work is done for them. “There’s always a MARC record available to download,” he says.

WorldCat Selection is also making the selection process easier for McGill’s liaison librarians, who can link from the service to vendor sites to get more information when needed. And with vendor information getting into the Acquisitions system faster, materials are ordered and available to users faster.

Farrell is pleased with the time savings at Princeton. “WorldCat Selection shortens the time from selection to expenditure and cuts four to five weeks out of the order process,” she explains. “This keeps many orders from going to back-order because it helps put Princeton closer to the front of the line when materials are ordered.”

And at Cornell, where WorldCat Selection began as ITSO CUL, the big question from colleagues at peer institutions is whether Cornell really saved $100,000 in staff costs using WorldCat Selection. Scott Wicks, Associate University Librarian for Central Library Operations tells them, “It’s only half true.”

Wicks explains that yes, Cornell did save that much in staff costs, but as new vendors that Cornell uses come on board with WorldCat Selection, the labor-intensive firm order process becomes more and more automated and the savings continue to grow. “So yes, we did save $100,000 initially, but we save that and more every year.”

Getting Started with WorldCat Selection

The WorldCat Selection Web site at www.oclc.org/sextion contains training materials and documentation to help libraries implement the service and get started using it. Training materials are organized by activity —selector, acquisitions staff and administrator— and include tutorials and guides, quick reference and set-up guides. Phone support is also available from OCLC regional service providers and OCLC support.

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Speaking of research, I never got around to posting on the ATG News Channel information regarding Peter Schilling’s IT Index. Amherst College enrolled 438 first-year students this fall, for a total student population of 1680 plus. Schilling gathered some statistics to tell the story of the changes occurring with the students at the College. There’s not enough room to publish the whole list, but here are a few “interesting,” or should I say “surprising” or “revealing.” Statistics. a) Number of students in the class of 2012 who brought desktop computers to campus: 14. b) Total number of students on campus this year that have landline phone service: 5. This is just the tip of the iceberg.

www.academiccommons.org/commons/essay/it-index

And, speaking of the Charleston Conference — how many of you noticed the Swets Out of the Box Scholarship Competition? We got many excellent entries and settled on a winner — Hana Levy <levay@uwashington.edu> and a runner-up, Helen Heinrich <helen.heinrich@csun.edu>. Like I said, there were lots of great essays and we had trouble settling on one! We will be publishing the essays in a forthcoming issue of ATG and on the ATG News Channel! Thanks to Swets and Christine Stimson <cstimson@us.swets.com> for funding this fantastically unique scholarship. I hope this continues year-to-year!? And, did you know that, like me, Christine, has a Greek background? Yassou!

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