Biz of Acq -- The Getting It System Toolkit (GIST) and Changing Workflow in Acquisitions and Collection Development

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What is GIST?
The Getting it System Toolkit, or “GIST,” is a system designed to change library workflow. It started with an enhanced interlibrary loan and acquisitions request system, integrating two formerly disparate workflows and allowing for user-driven selection. Utilizing API technology, JavaScript programming, and customizing the OpenURL Web pages of the interlibrary loan software ILLiad, the GIST interface enables effective, data-driven decisions at the point of request. Because the user now has price, holdings and delivery estimates, book reviews and ratings, and full-text availability options at the request interface, they can easily make decisions about the item they want, and give feedback about what items they need, why they are using the material, as well as how the library can deliver requested items. Beyond the user interface, GIST is a new request workflow system for Acquisitions and ILL. GIST streamlines the once manual process of mediating and processing purchase requests and allows the ILLiad software to automate those processes by routing requests customized for the library.

With GIST ILLiad add-ons, automatic searches of your favorite book suppliers and other acquisition services can be custom tailored and embedded into your workflow.

Why GIST?
In many libraries, the acquisitions request system is simply inefficient. Requests are handwritten on slips of paper, buried on hard-to-find Web forms, pieces of torn publisher catalog pages or post-it notes on someone’s desk. All these systems have the potential to lose requests, and become a “black box” to users. Using automated software to manage the request process is one step in creating more efficient workflows in acquisitions.

Secondly, with decreasing budgets and a recognized need for more user input into collection building and use, it makes financial and practical sense to make the user’s request part of the decision-making process. Student-centered and other user experience services are a popular trend in libraries, so collaboration with collection development is a logical next step. Patron-driven acquisitions should truly be patron-driven, augmented by data that helps the patron and library evaluate requests rapidly.

Third, more collaboration with ILL makes sense. Instead of looking at ILL data after the materials have already been requested and received, why not use a request-driven system to route requests to acquisitions at point-of-need? Good workflow design can improve a relationship that is needed in many libraries to streamline services. Also, this collaboration has the added benefit of automating formerly time-consuming processes in many acquisitions departments. No need for manual emails to be written each time you order or receive material and notify the patron. Because of the robust ILLiad request system, all requests are handled internally to the system, where staff from either department can view requests which have been routed back and forth between ILL and acquisitions staff (see Figure 1).

Fourth, we need to make data-driven and effective decisions at the point-of-request. If the 80/20 rule still applies in libraries, then we are making ineffective purchasing decisions with money that we can’t waste. On the other hand, ILL requests cost money and doing more interlibrary loan borrowing also increases costs at the expense of collection building.

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What is GIST?

Figure 1. An example of GIST workflow

This article, by Nathaniel Schwab, goes to the heart of the matter in the Higher Ed realm. The entire worldview held so comfortably by the publishers and the book sellers is under assault — and I mean determined assault. Some publishers and book sellers are trying to ride the wave — Leadership in the style of “Find a parade and try to get in front of it…”

Let’s be frank. The multiplicity of devices that can download and render e-content has grown faster and developed further and in more diversity than any of the commercial e-content offerings. We’ve got DRM’d eBooks, music, movies, in which the publishers or sellers struggle to bind the content to a particular, known user or set of devices — but a far greater body of content — content these devices can already access — is already out there, and out of the publisher’s or content seller’s hands. Some of the recent attempts to reign things back in, such as Apple’s shameful grab to take a 30 percent cut on in-app purchases, represent either greed, desperation, or both.

Whistling while walking past the graveyard… 🎶
GIST provides libraries a way to balance buy and borrow with strategies that leverage automation and data services. GIST allows for several streams of disparate information at the point of request — users and library staff can see how many other libraries own it in your area or consortia, how much it would cost to purchase it versus borrow it (this can be automatically determined by your ILL staff, thanks to custom holdings, which differentiates holdings based on consortia, region, free, fee, etc.), as well as if the book is available full-text online or in some other format. Thus, GIST easily enables library staff to make effective “buy or borrow” decisions at the point of request. The actual staff client interface is customizable for ILL and Acquisitions staff, bringing critical data to the relevant processes. (See Figure 2).

How it Works

GIST is really about leveraging systems we already have in place, adding the data we need to make decisions rapidly, and providing a flexible and robust request management system as the workflow platform. The request interface is simply an OpenURL request page or the standalone Web request page for your existing ILLiad request management system. Using API (Application Programming Interface) technology, the GIST purchase request system returns pricing and vendor information, holdings data from the WorldCat API (including local and consortia holdings), full-text availability information using Google Books, HathiTrust, and Index Data APIs (Project Gutenberg e-texts, Internet Archive, Open Content Alliance, and audio, etc.) (see Figure 3).

Besides enhancing the user interface with data from API, the GIST interface offers a feedback section for invaluable user feedback from your patrons. Questions can be status-specific and tailored to a library’s different user populations. For example, on SUNY Geneseo’s request form, we ask faculty to indicate if the book is being used for classroom teaching, research, or is unessential. They are also asked to give a pickup location preference (hold at circulation, shelf in the collection, or place on course reserves). This last question is left off the student purchase request form, where students are asked a slightly different question about their request (required textbook, etc.). In many cases, our users may not answer, but we are surprised by the respondents who give us honest and valued feedback to our questions. Because this is a customizable feature, libraries can ask any type of question they want (see Figure 4). Purchasing options are also included, giving users the opportunity to purchase a book directly through Amazon or another vendor.

Workflow and the Business of Routing Requests

The Getting It System Toolkit is designed to leverage systems and streamline workflow. Using the ILLiad software is one way of achieving better workflow design and synergy between ILL and acquisitions. Streamlining acquisitions workflow is simply utilizing ILLiad functions, including customizing request queues, email templates, and a routing system. ILLiad can automate sorting requests using a system of routing rules, which are queries that will automatically change the status of requests based upon certain conditions. If you create custom acquisition queues, you can have your requests routed and changed to a different status automatically based on your department workflow and attributes about the request (e.g., too widely held by consortia, free full-text available, or department review required). For example, once a request has been opened and processed, acquisitions staff can change the status of a request automatically with one click and send a specific Acquisitions ILLiad email to the patron notifying them that their item has been processed. Both ILL and acquisitions can now have their own custom queues and emails, and the ability to route a request back and forth between queues or even between ILL and Acquisition processes.

After customizing your ILLiad web pages, routing rules and email routing for GIST acquisitions processing, you will see that when a user submits a purchase request it is first routed into a custom queue for...
acquisitions staff in ILLiad’s Document Delivery module. With some client modifications and staff manager settings, Acquisitions will only see purchase requests associated with Acquisitions (see Figure 5). However, requests may be routed back and forth between Acquisitions and ILL as needed. Custom queues can be created for particular functions associated with Acquisitions, such as “Purchase Pending Budget Availability” for those requests which arrive in Acquisitions between budget cycles or “Purchase Awaiting Pre-Pub” for items which have not been published yet.

Staff double-click on a queue name to open it, and requests within may be sorted by any of the field labels (see Figure 6) to enable easy processing. Once a request is opened, staff will see a wealth of data which may inform decision making. Each purchase request includes the GIST User Feedback section with pricing information, delivery preference, and importance of request. Below this section is the item information section, which includes several fields customizable according to a library’s preference.

SUNY Geneseo repurposes the Call No. and Location fields for our consortia and state-level holdings data. This enables our Acquisitions staff to make quick decisions regarding diversity of the collection with respect to collection holdings within those two configurable groups (see Figure 7).

After a request has been processed, the acquisitions staff chooses an email routing to complete the transaction. Figure 8 shows a selection of email routing rules which SUNY Geneseo has in place. Emails can be customized and templates created to maximize efficiency. However, all emails can be edited on the fly when necessary. Once the email routing is used and this changes the status of the request automatically, no staff intervention is needed to manually place a request in another queue.

In ILLiad 8.0, Addons were introduced, enabling Web services to open up within the ILLiad staff client. This new feature has the added benefit of allowing acquisitions staff to have multiple browser windows open within the client and automates searching of familiar book jobbers and services. This eliminates the need to tab to various browser windows and use copy and paste to do manual searches. Addons are being programmed by Atlas Systems (ILLiad’s software developer) as well as the GIST Team, libraries, and consortia groups. The IDS Project and GIST Team have created addons that automatically search OCLC Connexion, RCL Web, GOBI, Powell’s Books, Amazon.com, and many more. Addons are designed to be added to your workflow the way you need them to get the job done more effectively.

**How Are We Doing?**

Until October of 2009, students had little voice in how library resources were purchased. Once GIST was implemented for faculty and acquisitions began to get comfortable with the new system, GIST was introduced to the students. SUNY Geneseo’s interlibrary loan office (Information Delivery Services or “IDS”) is heavily used by students and faculty and is an efficient and effective means of routing requests for materials we do not own. Students use this service to supplement Milne Library’s collection, so it seemed logical to let students make purchase requests as well. Beginning in October 2009, 119 items were purchased, with 54% of the items circulating between 1-2 times in the library. As of November 2010, 83 items have been purchased, with 71% of the titles circulating at least 1-2 times.

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Here is the breakdown of student requested items which were cataloged in 2009 and 2010:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Student requests purchased</th>
<th>Circulated 1-2 times</th>
<th>Circulated 3 or more times</th>
<th>Never circulated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009 (October – December)</td>
<td>119 total items cataloged</td>
<td>65 (55%)</td>
<td>32 (27%)</td>
<td>22 (19%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010 (January - November)</td>
<td>83 total items cataloged</td>
<td>59 (71%)</td>
<td>10 (12%)</td>
<td>14 (17%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. GIST Student purchase requests, 2009

Table 2. GIST Student purchase requests, 2010

Since October of 2009, we have been tracking GIST interlibrary loan and purchase requests. On the whole, 80% of requests initially processed by Acquisitions were eventually purchased (data collected from October 2009 to December 2010). 9% of requests were routed to IDS for borrowing from other institutions, and 11% of purchase requests were cancelled. The most frequent reasons for cancelling a request included textbook requests or items already owned by SUNY Geneseo. Items routed to ILL generally included holdings readily available within our consortia, thus easily obtained with a 2-3 day delivery window. The turnaround time for purchase requests averages out to 14 days.

Conclusion

GIST is a flexible system designed to leverage existing systems and improve workflows in acquisitions, as well as enable more cost-effective decisionmaking in ILL. Making use of the request management software ILLiad, GIST is designed to transform current purchasing workflow and help staff make better use of data and time. This year has seen the release of GIST’s Gift and Deselection Manager, which streamlines gift processing and weeding analysis. Next year, we are releasing...

The concepts behind this type of session format — releasing the wisdom of the crowd, expanding the Unconference approach — were described, but not fully-employed. Unfortunately, due to time limitation, the session ended with a rush to exchange contact information and without clear objectives for exactly what to do next.

That’s all the reports we have room for in this issue. Watch for the more reports from the 2010 Charleston Conference in upcoming issues of Against the Grain. Presentation material (PowerPoint slides, handouts) and taped session links from many of the 2010 sessions are available online. Visit the Conference Website at www.katina.info/conference. — KS
The Charleston ADVISOR
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Year: 2009
October: 153 Purchase Requests, 109 Purchased, 16 Routed to ILL, 2 Routed from ILL, 28 Cancelled, 17.34 Purchase Turnaround (avg. days)
November: 233 Purchase Requests, 182 Purchased, 15 Routed to ILL, 5 Routed from ILL, 36 Cancelled, 12.33 Purchase Turnaround (avg. days)
December: 150 Purchase Requests, 123 Purchased, 11 Routed to ILL, 0 Routed from ILL, 16 Cancelled, 14.18 Purchase Turnaround (avg. days)

Year: 2010
January: 249 Purchase Requests, 162 Purchased, 45 Routed to ILL, 4 Routed from ILL, 42 Cancelled, 10.57 Purchase Turnaround (avg. days)
February: 103 Purchase Requests, 38 Purchased, 41 Routed to ILL, 0 Routed from ILL, 24 Cancelled, 9.46 Purchase Turnaround (avg. days)
March: 192 Purchase Requests, 122 Purchased, 51 Routed to ILL, 2 Routed from ILL, 19 Cancelled, 15.05 Purchase Turnaround (avg. days)
April: 228 Purchase Requests, 152 Purchased, 56 Routed to ILL, 5 Routed from ILL, 20 Cancelled, 15.47 Purchase Turnaround (avg. days)
May: 493 Purchase Requests, 434 Purchased, 12 Routed to ILL, 1 Routed from ILL, 47 Cancelled, 15.24 Purchase Turnaround (avg. days)
June: 1026 Purchase Requests, 920 Purchased, 7 Routed to ILL, 5 Routed from ILL, 99 Cancelled, 31.03 Purchase Turnaround (avg. days)
July: 122 Purchase Requests, 112 Purchased, 4 Routed to ILL, 5 Routed from ILL, 6 Cancelled, 25.20 Purchase Turnaround (avg. days)
August: 74 Purchase Requests, 40 Purchased, 20 Routed to ILL, 11 Routed from ILL, 14 Cancelled, 19.23 Purchase Turnaround (avg. days)
September: 65 Purchase Requests, 50 Purchased, 15 Routed to ILL, 7 Routed from ILL, 14 Cancelled, 10.21 Purchase Turnaround (avg. days)
October: 116 Purchase Requests, 101 Purchased, 14 Routed to ILL, 7 Routed from ILL, 1 Cancelled, 6.46 Purchase Turnaround (avg. days)
November: 122 Purchase Requests, 101 Purchased, 15 Routed to ILL, 6 Routed from ILL, 6 Cancelled, 6.69 Purchase Turnaround (avg. days)
December: 141 Purchase Requests, 133 Purchased, 4 Routed to ILL, 15 Routed from ILL, 4 Cancelled, 9.00 Purchase Turnaround (avg. days)

3467 Purchase Requests, 2779 Purchased, 326 Routed to ILL, 93 Routed from ILL, 362 Cancelled

Table 3. Total GIST purchase requests, October 2009 – December 2010

Endnotes