# How Is That Going to Work? Rethinking Acquisitions in a Next-Generation ILS

Kathleen Spring
*Linfield College*, kspring@linfield.edu

Megan Drake
*Pacific University*, megan.banasek@pacificu.edu

Siôn Romaine
*University of Washington*, sromaine@uw.edu



Kathleen Spring, Megan Drake, and Siôn Romaine, "How Is That Going to Work? Rethinking Acquisitions in a Next-Generation ILS" (2013). *Proceedings of the Charleston Library Conference.*
http://dx.doi.org/10.5703/1288284315289

# How Is That Going to Work? Rethinking Acquisitions in a Next-Generation ILS

*Kathleen Spring, Collections Management Librarian and Assistant Professor, Linfield College*
*Megan Drake, Systems and Applications Librarian, Pacific University*
*Siôn Romaine, Acquisitions Librarian and Canadian Studies Librarian, University of Washington*

## Abstract

What do acquisitions policies and workflows look like in next-generation systems? How can institutions leverage automated processes to improve efficiency, and what happens when you also belong to a consortium that is looking to increase collaboration? The Orbis Cascade Alliance is a consortium of 37 public and private academic institutions in Oregon, Washington, and Idaho. In January 2012, the Alliance began a 2-year process of migrating all 37 institutions to a shared ILS. Migrating in four cohorts every 6 months, the first cohort of six institutions went live with Ex Libris's Alma and Primo in June 2013. Representatives from three of the six pioneering libraries discuss topics such as preparing for migration to a new system, changes in workflow, challenges and opportunities for a new system, and what may be coming down the pike for cooperative collection development in the Alliance.

## Introduction

Discussions of next-generation integrated library systems (next-gen ILS) have been appearing in the professional literature for a number of years (see Wang & Dawes, 2012; Wilson, 2012; and Yang, 2013 for recent examples). At its core, a next-gen ILS should integrate back office staff functions with a public discovery layer and should allow library professionals to do their work as seamlessly as possible while simultaneously providing a positive user experience for patrons. However, not all products are in the same stage of readiness. Institutions and consortia wanting to take advantage of these new systems may find themselves becoming development partners in order to continue to provide essential services.

What do acquisitions policies and workflows look like in a next-gen ILS? How can institutions leverage automated processes to improve efficiency? What happens when institutions also belong to a consortium looking to increase collaboration? This paper addresses those questions by documenting the initial phase of migration to a next-gen ILS for three members of the Orbis Cascade Alliance: Linfield College, Pacific University, and the University of Washington (UW). In January 2012, the Alliance began a 2-year process of migrating all 37 institutions to a shared ILS. (For a fuller description of the ILS selection process, refer to Cornish, Jost, & Arch, 2013.)

Migrating in four cohorts every 6 months, the first cohort of six institutions went live with Ex Libris's Alma and Primo in June 2013. By addressing issues such as preparing for migration, changes in workflow, challenges and opportunities for a new system, and collaborative collection development (CCD) that may result from the migration, we hope to offer a perspective for other institutions that may be contemplating their own migrations.

## Background: The Alliance

The Orbis Cascade Alliance is a consortium of 37 public and private academic institutions in Oregon, Washington, and Idaho. Collaboration dates back to 1993, when five Oregon libraries formed the Orbis Union Catalog. In 1996, six Washington libraries followed suit, and the two groups were soon using the same courier system to share physical resources and collaborating on the purchasing of electronic resources. In 2002, the two consortia merged into the Orbis Cascade Alliance.

Beyond its history of collaboration, the Alliance has a history of innovation. In addition to being the second consortia to use INN-Reach from Innovative Interfaces (III), Alliance libraries have been development partners for III's Electronic Resource Management (ERM) module, the OCLC WorldCat Local discovery interface, and the OCLC WorldCat Navigator resource sharing system.




http://dx.doi.org/10.5703/1288284315289

The Alliance "consider[s] the combined collections of member institutions as one collection" (Orbis Cascade Alliance, 2007). To that end, the Alliance has selected a preferred monograph vendor, implemented a demand-driven acquisitions (DDA) e-book program, participated in a distributed print repository program, and pursued consortial licensing. However, members agreed the best way to move forward with CCD (and the collaborative technical services that would support it) would be if all Alliance libraries shared a single ILS. In 2012, an RFP for a consortial ILS was issued. Motivated by aging servers and expiring software contracts, the Alliance opted for an aggressive implementation of the shared ILS—37 institutions in 24 months.

The Alliance selected Alma and Primo from Ex Libris based on its vision for a collaborative ILS and its Center of Excellence model that promotes development and continual enhancement of consortial services best practices. Ex Libris's concept of the Network Zone (NZ) (which allows Alliance members to share bibliographic records, see holdings from Alliance libraries at the point of order, and share resources) was very appealing to a group of libraries interested in moving forward with the "one library" concept.

## Collaborating in Theory and in Practice: Alliance and Alma Structures

Decision making and policy development is guided by multiple Alliance-wide committees and groups:

- Shared ILS Implementation Team (SILS), composed of staff from member libraries, to support and manage the migration;
- SILS Working Groups for specific Alma functional areas;
- Collaborative Technical Services Team (CTST) charged with "exploring and implementing shared practices in technical services operations" (Orbis Cascade Alliance, 2013);
- CTST working groups in acquisitions, cataloging, and serials/ERM;
- SILS Policy Committee to resolve high-level, Alliance-wide issues;
- Collection Development and Management Committee to develop recommendations regarding CCD and management; and,
- Alliance staff (including a Shared ILS Program Manager, a Collection Services Program Manager, and a Resource Sharing Program Manager).

Although all Alliance members share one implementation of Alma, each institution has its own Institution Zone (IZ) within the implementation. The IZ contains local inventory, ordering and licensing information, patron data, and a handful of bibliographic records that cannot be shared across institutions. The NZ contains the vast majority of bibliographic records for Alliance libraries, allowing staff at any institution to see what titles are held by other institutions. The Community Zone (CZ) utilizes Alma's Central Knowledge Base and contains mostly electronic titles held by Alma customers. Shifting institutions to reimagine acquisitions workflows with a more collaborative focus requires a fully functioning NZ and CZ (replete with the necessary tools to manage shared records).

## Reimagining Acquisitions Workflows

Cohort 1 was comprised of four small institutions (Linfield, Marylhurst University, Pacific, and Willamette University), one medium institution (Western Washington University), and one large institution (UW). As the first cohort entered the implementation period, a number of questions arose.

- What might change look like?
- Are there philosophical shifts occurring that might impact workflows?
- What are the most pressing problems for which we need solutions?

Because of the diversity across institutions, Cohort 1 knew that change would not look the same at each institution. Some of the differences in workflows were certainly due to size of the institution/volume of materials, staffing, and other resource-related factors. Still, other differences were based in long-standing historical

practices. By thinking about change in light of the impending migration, we were able to consider how other opportunities (such as staffing changes or new consortial policies) might shape or even encourage change further.

The implementation process also demanded that we examine some of the fundamental philosophical positions we held regarding existing workflows and organizational patterns. Would the design of the new system fundamentally change the way we thought about how to achieve our daily work? Would the potential benefits we hoped to see lead us to view the acquisitions process differently than we had in the past? Moving to a system with an inherently different architecture enabled us to consider making radical changes to existing practices, but because many features in Alma were still in development at the time of go-live, many of us began by making smaller changes first. Nevertheless, the process of re-evaluating existing practices has helped us to think about ways in which we might make larger changes in the future.

Cohort 1 understood that problems would likely emerge after go-live as a result of data migration. One potential concern was the management of e-resources throughout the acquisitions process. Another concern was how we could effectively manage our shared resources through the NZ, since the tools to do so were not yet a part of Alma. As such, we immediately began seeing issues crop up with duplicate records in the IZs and NZ, overlaying of brief bibliographic records from vendors onto full bibliographic records already in the NZ, and other record management headaches. Although some of the needed functionality was already slated for future development, we realized a number of stop-gap measures might need to be employed. An additional priority, then, was to identify what expertise we had, either at individual institutions or across the consortium, that could be leveraged to help develop solutions.

## The Alma Acquisitions Model

Before beginning to implement any changes to acquisitions workflows, we needed to understand the structural principles of the Alma acquisitions model. Unlike III's Millennium (used by all Cohort 1 institutions), acquisitions type in Alma is a primary driver for subsequent actions in the ordering process, including the ways in which automation might occur. Because the acquisitions type cannot be changed, it is paramount for staff to understand the implications of selecting a particular acquisitions type when creating an order. Additionally, acquisitions in Alma is highly inventory centric. In Alma, item barcodes propel the technical services workflows forward. Libraries can employ work orders, which help to manage items in the various stages of processing and to increase item visibility for patrons.

Beyond these different structural frameworks, the NZ underpins acquisitions and resource management in Alma. Collaborative enterprises in this realm can help to reduce duplicated efforts across institutions, but collaboration need not mean the end of local decision making. The NZ holds much promise for CCD, but it must be well integrated with institutional data.

How Alma defines user roles also affects the Alma acquisitions model. Alma bundles permissions together and assigns them to particular user roles; however, institutions do not have the flexibility to modify those roles in any way. Staff users assigned a particular role have all the permissions Alma thinks are necessary, whether or not local workflows are in alignment with that assumption. Less granularity when managing permissions has sometimes been a point of frustration for staff, but it has also encouraged reassessment of workflows and responsibilities. At Linfield, for instance, serials order records had been tracked externally, which meant serials staff had never learned acquisitions functions within Millennium. In Alma, serials check-in necessitates a purchase order line so that individual issues can be received. As a result, serials staff are now doing work that historically would have fallen to acquisitions staff.

## Change Is Not a Four-Letter Word

The rate of change during implementation was often overwhelming for Cohort 1, particularly because of the heavy testing and extremely short

turnaround time needed throughout this period. One of the benefits, however, was the degree to which staff learned to accept fluctuation as a normal part of the evolving systems. Although not embraced by all staff to the same extent, the shifting natures of Alma and Primo allowed some institutions to "clean house" and re-examine priorities and policies from a new perspective.

UW and Linfield both synchronized procedures and policies in acquisitions and fulfillment. Prior to migration, the UW Libraries and the UW Law Library each had their own Millennium installations, but the Alma implementation merged UW and UW Law into a single IZ. Linfield, planning for a staffing change at its Portland campus library shortly after migration, utilized the opportunity to compare cataloging workflows at its two libraries. Greater standardization between the two units has made processes smoother for everyone.

One of the benefits of a next-gen ILS is the integration of tools to manage resources. Previous systems have traditionally been siloed, meaning staff often utilize an ILS, an ERM, and a knowledge base (which often cannot communicate with one another) to manage all their resources. Next-gen systems, by contrast, rely on "creating integrated platforms from the ground up" precisely to avoid this headache (Wilson, 2012, p. 110). Cohort 1 institutions anticipate that at least some silos will be merged as a result of migration.

Alma is designed to take advantage of automation via EDI, embedded order data records from vendors, DDA programs, electronic invoicing, and integration with external systems for payment. Wherever approval is needed in the acquisitions process, there are opportunities for implementing automation, and this can be tailored to each institution's needs.

Beyond synchronization, integration, and automation, the migration has spurred change at institutions by blurring the lines between acquisitions and cataloging. Although some libraries were already living with this "new normal" because of their size and staff responsibilities, others had much clearer divisions of labor that maintained a marked separation between the two areas. Linfield and Pacific have begun to think more about copy cataloging at the point of ordering, but this means staff need to have training in both areas. The Alliance has a set of floor bibliographic standards for records in the NZ, and the expectation is that all institutions will adhere to these standards (Orbis Cascade Alliance Collaborative Technical Services Team, 2011). Acquisitions staff asked to take on roles traditionally thought of as cataloging will need familiarity with these floor standards to know whether records need to be enhanced or flagged for more extensive cataloging once materials are received.

## Preparing to Migrate

As suggested earlier, the first order of business when preparing to migrate to a new ILS is learning the underlying data structure for the system. Understanding the structural scaffolding for each functional area is vital to migration success; without this knowledge, libraries cannot make informed decisions about data migration and systems configuration. Cohort 1 institutions lacked some of this information at critical decision points, which led to unexpected results; subsequent cohorts, however, should see better results.

While the structural design and the emphasis on acquisitions type impacts staff workflows, it also impacts migration decisions because libraries must ensure that legacy data codes are mapped to the correct codes in Alma. If the acquisitions type for open orders is not correctly mapped during migration, the technical services workflow in Alma will be incorrect. In addition, staff must be attuned to hidden idiosyncrasies in the new system. For example, the acquisitions method chosen at the time of order (Purchase vs. Purchase at Vendor System) determines if the order will be submitted to the vendor directly from Alma. UW did not fully understand this distinction at the time of migration and chose to migrate all orders with an acquisitions method of Purchase, even though its subscription orders are placed through vendor web sites; this meant the initial workflow for these orders was wrong.

Libraries must put everything on the table for consideration when preparing to migrate. Are there code structures in the legacy system that should be redesigned in order to ease migration? Fund code structure in Alma is hierarchical with allocated funds nesting inside summary funds which nest inside ledgers. Both Pacific and UW had flat fund code structures and redesigned their fund codes for more seamless migration. Alma also required that locations have only a single call number type within each location at the time of migration. Linfield needed to add new locations to their existing location code structure to ensure each location had only one call number type.

## Data Clean-up

Once attention shifts to actual clean-up activities, the first factor to consider is whether any data required in the new system might be missing in the legacy data. For example, Alma requires a vendor for all orders, but every institution in Cohort 1 had at least a few order records that were missing vendors. Some members chose to create a dummy vendor record to assign to the problem order records, while others assigned vendors from their existing vendor lists. Beyond missing data elements, staff should also determine if the underlying data structure requires an order record for the expected technical services workflow. For example, Alma does not allow staff to receive and "check in" a serial unless the serial bibliographic record has an order record attached. Knowing these constraints during the data clean-up period enables staff to create orders in the legacy system if time permits.

Data clean-up activities should include ensuring that all migrating records have the correct match points used by the new system so that data are properly linked. This might include location codes, OCLC numbers, and barcodes. Finally, staff should examine all legacy data with an eye to what is actually needed in the new system. Deleting extraneous records and data that may not be indexed and searchable in the new system removes potential fail points and streamlines the migration process. Pacific, which had never purged order records in III, purged all one-time orders greater than 7 years old that had been paid and closed. This reduced the number of migrated order records by more than 50% and greatly streamlined the migration process for orders.

## Testing

During implementation, Cohort 1 libraries provided an initial data load to Ex Libris to populate our test environments. Once that initial load was ready, we began testing. In acquisitions, orders of all types were assessed for problems, including monographs, serials, electronic resources, one-time and standing orders, and approval plans. We analyzed fund code structures, including allocations set during configuration, and we examined vendor data for completeness and accuracy. Libraries also tested all configurations by working through standard activities such as creating orders, receiving items, and invoicing.

In most cases, data clean-up was still ongoing in Millennium throughout the testing period, but testing helped to reveal additional areas for clean-up. Mappings may not have been configured correctly, configurations may have been overlooked, or data may have been missing in Millennium, causing migration errors. Data issues discovered at this time often needed to be resolved jointly by the institution and Ex Libris. Having a checklist and testing plan ensured as many problems as possible were caught before the final data load.

## What is Next? Collaboration on the Horizon

Institutions in the eye of the Alma migration hurricane can have a difficult time seeing the long view; change comes so fast that staff may only have enough time to react to the current crisis rather than to think about the long-term implications. While the Orbis Cascade Alliance is still very much focused on migration for Cohorts 2, 3, and 4, we see real opportunities for collaboration on the horizon, including shared import profiles and merge methods, approval plans, activation of e-resources, normalization rules, vendor information, and record loading. Ex Libris needs to continue its development of Alma, particularly with regard to NZ functionality, and we hope that work will ultimately enable us to deduplicate efforts across institutions. While

enthusiasm and participation in the project is high, there is still a long road ahead, and we must guard against burnout. What, then, will continue to propel us forward after such an exhausting migration? Put simply, our users. We believe our efforts to reshape how we deliver library services will reap future benefits in terms of CCD, collaborative technical services, and a regional understanding of how best to serve our users.

## References


Cornish, A., Jost, R., & Arch, X. (2013). Selecting a shared 21st century management system. *Collaborative Librarianship, 5*(1), 16–28.

Orbis Cascade Alliance. (2004). *Mission statement*. Retrieved from http://www.orbiscascade.org/index/mission-statement

Orbis Cascade Alliance. (2007). *Collection development vision statement*. Retrieved from http://www.orbiscascade.org/index/collection-development-vision-statement

Orbis Cascade Alliance. (2013). *Collaborative Technical Services Team (2012+)*. Retrieved from http://www.orbiscascade.org/index/ctst-2012

Orbis Cascade Alliance Collaborative Technical Services Team. (2011). *Final report to the Orbis Cascade Alliance Council: September 29, 2011*. Retrieved from http://orbiscascade.org/index/cms-filesystem-action/collaborative_ts/ctst%20final%20report%20complete.pdf

Wang, Y., & Dawes, T. A. (2012). The next generation integrated library system: A promise fulfilled. *Information Technology and Libraries, 31*(3), 76–84. http://dx.doi.org/10.6017/ital.v31i3.1914

Wilson, K. (2012). Introducing the next generation of library management systems. *Serials Review, 38*, 110–123. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.serrev.2012.04.003

Yang, S. (2013). From integrated library systems to library management services: Time for change? *Library Hi Tech News, 2*, 1–8. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/LHTN-02-2013-0006