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Teetering Between Two Systems for Managing E-Book Records

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Abstract

Drawing on our experience with the Primo discovery service at Baruch College, we will discuss the extent to which libraries can expect that they can treat e-book packages in discovery services in the same manner that they treat journal packages. Given that many libraries are still trying to bridge parallel systems for the discovery of e-books—the catalog and the discovery service—this presentation will help organize the problem so that we can develop a deeper understanding of the challenges and outline a map for charting the way ahead.

Introduction

Like many libraries that have set up web-scale discovery services in recent years, we are still trying to maintain our legacy catalog at the same time and ensure that both are equally useful to our community. This balancing act has created a new set of tensions that we would like to explore in some depth today. Before examining these issues, we would like to first introduce Baruch College so you can get the necessary context to understand how the situation is playing out at our institution.

Baruch College is one of eleven senior colleges within the City University of New York system (CUNY), which has in total 21 campuses across the five boroughs of New York City. We are a commuter school in the heart of New York City with over 18,000 students, 35 undergraduate majors, 25 graduate-level specializations, and one doctoral program in business. Our library has 67 full time staff, 21 of whom are librarians. Our annual materials budget is currently \$1.7 million, and we have over 650,000 electronic resources. Baruch's collection of e-books consists of roughly 280,000 titles.

For our presentation, it is important to keep in mind the consortia in which Baruch's library operates. We work within a very mediated environment where systems are centrally managed by a central CUNY Office of Library Services (CUNY OLS) for 21 CUNY schools. Since 2002, CUNY has used Ex Libris Aleph as its union

catalog. Like other individual schools in the CUNY system, we at Baruch are not able to directly download or manipulate large sets of data. When uploading sets of records, files must be sent to the CUNY OLS, who vet them and add them to Aleph.

In 2005, the CUNY library system began using SFX as its link resolver. In fall 2014, the CUNY libraries launched a shared web-scale discovery service powered by Ex Libris Primo and locally branded as OneSearch. For both SFX and Primo, direct administrator access is limited to staff at CUNY OLS; we at Baruch must e-mail the central office to request changes, fixes, updates, and the like.

E-Books at Baruch

Some of our e-book collections are bought centrally by CUNY OLS for all CUNY libraries, such as ebrary, while other collections, such as Books24x7, are ones we got on our own. We acquire e-books in a number of different ways. Some are purchases, some are subscriptions. Some are bought on a title-by-title basis, while others are part of a package. Most are selected by library staff, but a growing number are selected through our demand-driven acquisitions (DDA) service from MyiLibrary.

Prior to our getting a discovery system, we only had to worry about one workflow to handle batch loading of e-book records. If we had at least fifty records, we had a time-consuming process that required a specialist who was, ideally, a librarian with cataloging experience. First, the purchase

needed to be confirmed. Then the head of collection management would send the information to the metadata librarian and the user experience (UX) librarian (whose responsibilities also include assisting with the management of electronic resources). The information passed on would be about the resource itself (was it a one-time upload, was it a file that should be checked for newer titles, was this a DDA plan or a real purchase, do we want the records to go to OCLC). The information about the batch upload also had to include instructions about where to find the MARC record file and about any message we needed to add to the records.

The next step for the traditional workflow involved the metadata librarian, who would grab the file and use MarcEdit to edit the file. Next, the metadata librarian would send the file to the CUNY Office of Library Services so it could be loaded into an Aleph testing server. The metadata librarian would then review the records in the testing server and, if all was okay, authorize the files to be moved into the live instance of the catalog.

While the metadata librarian was getting the records into the catalog, the UX librarian, who also happens to assist with electronic resource management, would configure the resource in EZproxy if it were on a new platform and add links to it on the library's database pages.

Once the records were loaded into the live catalog, the metadata librarian would then record the number range for the records and the date of the load into a wiki page. If appropriate, the UX librarian or the head of collection management might make an announcement on the library's internal mailing list or staff blog to share the news about the new records in the catalog.

E-Books at Baruch Now That We Have a Discovery Service

Since we launched our discovery service from Primo last year, we have been presented with a new choice for e-books. We can either display the MARC records that we added to our catalog or, depending on the e-book platform, use records

from the platform vendor that are available within the Primo Central Index (PCI). Just as we can activate in the PCI a database of articles so that it is discoverable in our instance of Primo, so too can we activate e-book packages.

This has changed our workflow with e-books. Now, when we get a new e-book platform, we check Ex Libris documentation to see if it is available as a package to be activated in the PCI. If it is, then we do so. But since we still want to make sure our catalog has the same set of e-books, we also have to continue the traditional e-book workflow of getting MARC records for those e-books into the catalog. This new workflow, though, has one new step: the central Office of Library Services (OLS) at CUNY adds an element to the MARC record so that they are not automatically ingested into the Primo Central Index as well. If we didn't take this step, we would find duplicates of e-book records in Primo: one from the vendor whose records we activated in the PCI and one from us—the MARC records that came over from the catalog.

Where E-Book Management Gets Problematic

This new option of using vendor records in the PCI should mean less work for Baruch and for the CUNY Office of Library Services. One time saver is something that happens rarely but can involve a lot of work in MARC records: vendors changing base URLs for books in their collection. We are dealing with this issue now, thanks to the merger of Springer and Palgrave Macmillan. All the URLs for our Palgrave e-books will soon change as they move over to the Springer platform, which means that we will need to update the URLs in the 856 field of our MARC records for those titles. But in the case of the records for those same titles that came from the vendor as a package to be activated in the PCI, the work of updating URLs is no longer our responsibility but rather that of Ex Libris and the vendor from whom they are getting the records. This kind of updating of URLs by vendors is something we are already used to in the case of serials, where libraries have been relying on knowledge bases from products like Ex Libris's SFX or Serials Solution's 360 Core to do

that work for periodicals collections and aggregator databases.

It is not so simple for e-books, though. The problem is twofold. First, at Baruch we do not yet have the technology we know we need—a library services platform like Ex Libris's Alma or ProQuest's Intota. Such a system would integrate the cataloging, acquisitions, and serials management systems we currently have. Instead, we are trying to make sure that both our discovery service and our traditional catalog are both regarded by our users as places to find every single print and e-book that we have. And so we awkwardly remain straddling two systems—the catalog and the discovery system—and two workflows for handling e-books.

The other part of the problem, and this is not unique to Baruch, is that we are finding that there are some e-books we cannot easily get into our discovery service unless we rely on MARC records. This problem comes in two variations. First, there are some e-book packages we have at Baruch that are not available yet in the Primo Central Index. We would love to activate them in the PCI, but Ex Libris has not gotten the records yet or has not finished indexing them. The other variation on this problem is how to “activate” in the PCI those e-books that we have bought not as a package but instead on a title-by-title basis. Consider the reality that when we buy e-books individually, we have lots of choices about who to order from (such as EBSCO, Coutts, the publisher) and choices about what platform we want to access them on (such as MyiLibrary or the publisher's own platform). It is hard to conceive of how this variety of purchase and access options can be easily

handled in the PCI. On a related note, there does not seem to be a way in the PCI to handle records for DDA titles.

There is also an issue relating to the speed with which Ex Libris gets updates to the e-book packages in the PCI. In theory, our traditional workflow for getting the latest e-book records for a platform we have had for a while means we can check as often as we like for new records. We could check monthly or even weekly. In the PCI, though, it is unlikely the e-book packages that we can activate will be updated more often than four times a year. So it is possible that our e-book records in the catalog will be more up to date than what we have in Primo.

In most cases, the indexing of e-books in the PCI does not make their full-text searchable. Only the metadata for the e-books can be searched. In the case of reference books, it is usually not the case that the indexing is at the entry level, which is a missed opportunity to open up these works to readers who might otherwise pass them by.

We recognize that some of the awkwardness of this situation is due to our need to maintain a legacy catalog and a discovery system at the same time. Some day when we decommission the catalog and move to a library services platform, the workflows for e-books will in theory be simpler. We also expect that in time Ex Libris will have added even more e-book packages that we can activate, maybe even all the ones we would ever have.

Until that day, though, we're having to work on our balancing act.