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Jennifer R. Culley
The University of Southern Mississippi, jennifer.culley@usm.edu

Cindy Human
Midwest Library Service, human@midwestls.com

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Ordering E-Books From a Print Book Vendor

Jennifer R. Culley, Collection Management and Acquisitions Librarian, The University of Southern Mississippi

Cindy Human, Regional Sales Manager, Midwest Library Service

Abstract

The University of Southern Mississippi began ordering e-books through its primary print book vendor, Midwest Library Service, in 2016. The demand to purchase e-books has steadily increased, and when the opportunity arose to save valuable staff time searching over several vendor sites for e-books and print books by consolidating the search interface, a change was made. There were multiple steps to set up this program; however, the time invested was worth it. While there were challenges along the way, the program is up and running, and there have been many benefits in addition to the staff time savings.

Background

The University of Southern Mississippi is located in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, and was founded in 1910. It has a current enrollment of about 15,000 students, both in person and online. The University of Southern Mississippi has more than 180 programs that grant bachelor's, master's, and PhD degrees.

Midwest Library Service is headquartered in Bridgeton, Missouri, and has been in business for over half a century. Midwest Library Service provides a comprehensive range of products and services, including books supplied from more than 20,000 U.S., Canadian, and U.K. publishers, and an out-of-print book service. In addition, they now facilitate access to ProQuest e-books provided on their EBL and Ebrary platforms. Being a small- to medium-size vendor, Midwest Library Service waited to provide e-books until the top e-book platforms were established, and their customers would not have to repeatedly change platforms with industry changes.

The University of Southern Mississippi has had increased enrollment in distance programs and each year has more online courses and programs added. The demand for materials for online students, and to increase access to materials in general, has increased the requests to purchase e-books. In addition to the increase in requests for e-books is the increased availability of e-books from a wide variety of vendors. It was appealing when book vendors first started offering access to ordering e-books, as it offered the opportunity to cut staff time spent

searching multiple vendor sites for materials, since several e-book vendors could now also be searched together and in conjunction with print materials. Southern Miss previously ordered e-books with another book vendor but only briefly, and within the last two years, it switched to ordering directly with the e-book vendors E-book Library (EBL) and Ebrary. Extra fees and procedural changes were the primary reason the previous plan with the other vendor was cancelled. In 2016, these two packages of e-books became available through Midwest and thus was a major reason for setting up an e-book program with them. Another reason was the convenience and streamlining of workflows by having the ability to order e-books and print materials through the same interface, is why The University of Southern Mississippi ultimately decided to try purchasing e-books through their primary print vendor, Midwest Library Service. Southern Miss has been purchasing print books from Midwest Library Service for several years and already had a well-established working relationship.

Process

The University of Southern Mississippi began ordering e-books through Midwest Library Service about midway through 2016. The e-books are provided by ProQuest, who owns and has plans to merge the EBL and Ebrary platforms in a two-phase upgrade, the first of which took place on November 15th for The University of Southern Mississippi, with a second phase soon to follow that will eventually provide access to more than 700,000 e-book titles in this program.

This program has allowed for the ability to order both e-books and print through one system after setting up the e-book plan in a few easy steps.

1. Complete Midwest's customer specification form to open account.
2. Complete Midwest's e-book profile/
3. Sign ProQuest's license agreement for third-party ordering. (Southern Miss signed a license agreement for Ebrary and EBL separately because the platforms had not yet been merged into one by ProQuest.)

Midwest's InterACQ database allows searching for both print and e-books, with options to choose single user, three users or multiuser where indicated and available for e-books, and users can place both formats in one cart for ordering. InterACQ is a Web-based system that allows for

searching, selecting, and ordering of materials (see Figures 1, 2 and 3). The University of Mississippi only allows acquisitions staff to order from this system, with limited searching and selection rights granted to librarian liaisons. Acquisitions staff has the option of ordering within InterACQ or by electronic data interchange (EDI). After e-books are ordered, in the InterACQ system or by EDI, an order confirmation e-mail will be sent from Midwest the following business day. Machine-readable cataloging (MARC) records that are available directly from ProQuest are free and downloadable from the admin login on the ProQuest site. (The University of Southern Mississippi chose this option for MARC record retrieval.) Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) or Midwest's MARC records are also available at time of invoice but for a fee. Invoices are e-mailed from Midwest within a week after the purchase of an e-book.

The screenshot displays the InterACQ web interface. At the top, a navigation bar includes 'Main Menu', 'Cindy Human - Cindy Human - 33330', and links for 'Review/Process Carts', 'Print', 'Contact Midwest', 'Help', and 'Log Off'. Below this is a secondary bar with 'Pending Actions', 'Express Ordering', 'Collection Development', 'Account Activity', 'Approval Options', 'Standing Order Options', 'System Options', and 'Sales'. The main content area is titled 'Collection Development | Database Access' and features a 'Search Options' section. This section lists various databases available for search, including 'The Comprehensive Database', 'The Core Collection Development Programs (CCDP)', 'The Library of Congress Catalog', 'The New Book Selection Service (NBSS)', and 'The entire Ebrary E-Book Platform'. It also includes checkboxes for 'Print Books' and 'E-Books', and radio buttons for selecting a database. Below this, there are checkboxes for 'All Access Types', 'Single-User', '3-User', and 'Multi-User'. A 'Sequence by' dropdown menu is set to 'Title'. The 'Search by' dropdown is set to 'Title', and the search term 'HOPE AND CHANGE' is entered in the text box. There are also fields for 'Select a Publication Date range' and 'Use a selection profile to filter your search'. At the bottom, there are 'Submit' and 'Reset' buttons, and a link to 'View last Search Results'.

Figure 1. Search screen in Midwest's InterACQ system.

Figure 2. Results of search for the title “Hope and Change” in the InterACQ system.

Figure 3. Order Record in the InterACQ system for the e-book *After Hope and Change*. This is the where the e-book can be placed in the order cart for purchase.

Benefits

There have been several benefits that helped influence this decision for The University of Southern Mississippi to order e-books with Midwest Library Service, and benefits have been seen since it began. One benefit is that there are fewer payments needed for ordering multiple formats from the same vendor instead of separate vendors. The ordering procedures were also identical for ordering print or e-books, which required no additional training for staff. Staff are now using one interface for ordering instead of three, which saves valuable staff time in searching and ordering. There is only one invoice to purchase print and e-books at the same time with Midwest, as opposed to several if ordering print plus e-books from EBL or Ebrary directly. There have been no additional costs as with previous vendor where we ordered both print and e-books, and any issues in ordering, shipping, or invoicing are resolved with one customer service department. The ability to select print or e-book formats from one search instead of multiple vendor site searches and the availability of both viewable on one site is invaluable especially during higher volume ordering times.

Although the program is new for Midwest Library Service, there are already forthcoming upgrades in the works. Currently, The University of Southern Mississippi receives slip notifications each week for new books. These titles are matched with the profile setup in InterACQ for each academic department. E-books will eventually show up in these slips notifications as appropriate for each profile, and a possible upgrade date for this feature is slated for 2018. Midwest Library Service is also pursuing the ability to provide e-books from additional e-book vendors in the future. No information is available as to what vendors or when this might happen.

Challenges

With any new program or service, there are always challenges when getting started. Some challenges

that came up along the way were that the program was implemented at the end of the fiscal year for The University of Southern Mississippi, and ordering does not usually begin until about a month into the new fiscal year once department allocations for materials are established. This caused a delay of about two months before e-books could be ordered, although the records had been loaded in the system, and searching capabilities were turned on. When ordering finally began, the first e-book was ordered, but the record did not come in as quickly as expected. It was discovered that some settings with ProQuest were not correctly set. As a result, the first invoice was also delayed. Also, the ability to order EBL titles was not available immediately as expected because of the merge and upgrade ProQuest was making for the EBL and Ebrary platforms. However, both ProQuest and Midwest aided in some of these corrections to get the plan corrected, and the service activated as quickly as possible.

Summary

Although a slow start, the ability to order e-books and print from the same interface has been a nice streamline in the work flow for the Acquisitions Unit at The University of Southern Mississippi. While Southern Miss orders e-books from a variety of vendors, having the ability to search less interfaces is helpful. Midwest Library Service has been responsive for issues and has helped tremendously in the process of setting up this program. Having already been trained on the InterACQ interface and knowing how to search and order materials from Midwest the addition of e-book ordering did not change any procedures or add any additional staff training time for this new service. With e-books eventually showing up in slip notifications, as well as possibility of additional partnering of Midwest Library Service with other e-book providers, this arrangement could save more staff time in the future for Southern Miss.