August 2014

We Can Work It Out: What an ERM Needs

Susan Klimley
Columbia University, klimley@columbia.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg

Part of the Library and Information Science Commons

Recommended Citation
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.5495

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.
We Can Work It Out: What an ERM Needs

by Susan Klimley (Serials Collection and Electronic Resource Librarian, Health Sciences Library, Columbia University)
<klimley@columbia.edu>

There are, I believe, two types of electronic resources librarians: those who come from technical services and focus on payments, records, coordination between OPACs and link resolvers; and those coming from public services who try to figure out why electronic resources aren’t working for particular patrons, field requests for new resources from patrons, and make cancellation and swap decisions.

I come to electronic resources from a collection development and public services background. So when Heather Klusendorf asked me to write an article on the perfect ERM, my first reaction was: that’s for the technical-services electronic resources librarians. I’m only a visitor to their world. Then I started thinking about how I spend much of my day managing the electronic resources at the Columbia University Health Sciences Library (HSL). Why shouldn’t the Columbia ERM contain the information I need to manage electronic resources from my perspective?

The most basic information I require in an ERM is the ability to locate the titles to which my branch library subscribes. This information should include the actual price we were charged — not the list price, preferably including any special costs like vendor’s charges or maintenance fees for the historic files. Additionally, titles we have access to via uniform title lists or bundled as part of content packages — like those accessed through EBSCO packages or Ovid’s Lippincott Williams & Wilkins Total Access Collection — should be distinguishable from titles to which we have direct subscriptions. I want to know the publisher and platform for each journal, and that information should be connected to a clear explanation of the publisher’s policies regarding cancellation and swaps.

Next, I want a notes field that I can use. This field is needed to keep track of any manner of special information about individual titles. Supplements that are online only after a certain year or can be accessed only from the publisher’s website are good examples of the information I would record. Information on odd layouts of access screens, for example E-pubs ahead of print, would be located on a link separate from the archive link. I would also use this field to record special faculty or departmental issues with a title, such as “added at request of department because faculty member is on editorial board.”

I could add a new notes field and transfer that information so I don’t search for it over and over again. And while we are at it, I would like to put journals that have been requested by patrons or identified as new titles into this system with much of the same information as we have for the titles we subscribe to — cost, platform, ISI ranking, etc. — and information such as who requested the title, their status in the university, and how many ILLs we have done for the title. I would use this information to create a list showing the backlog of titles my patrons would like us to have which we haven’t been able to afford.

I would like the system to be flexible enough so that if I realize some piece of information placed in the notes field is particularly useful, I could add a new notes field and transfer that information to its own field. I like to be able to search and sort titles and create reports as needed over time.

Now your reaction to this might be: well, she doesn’t want much, does she? But this is the information I need every time a patron has a problem with a title and when I need to add, cut, or swap titles. You might also say: well, you don’t really need an ERM like this, because clearly you have been making these decisions all along.

The reality is I have an ERM with all this information in it. I made it with my own ten fingers and File Maker. When I first created my own ERM, all it included was the name, publisher, platform, and a notes field. But I added fields for what I needed, most often splitting things off from the notes field as I found information like ILL data that was helpful in managing the collection.

So what’s the rub? My database is not complete. The Columbia Health Sciences Library estimates we have over 4,500 titles in the collection, and my database has only 2,800 titles. A good number of those are requested but not owned by HSL. What my database does have are the titles that need to be actively managed: those titles that give patrons problems, those that have lower use and are swap candidates, and the titles we may want to add. I can produce a list of the titles remaining in print to see if we can finally move them to electronic access or a list of lower use titles by publisher to see if we can swap them for titles more frequently requested by patrons.

A second rub: I input much of the data by hand as I need it. File Maker can import data from Excel, and perhaps I could import the usage statistics I need (those for HSL titles). But I don’t. I find it useful to work from the complete Columbia usage reports, identifying the HSL titles and then recording only in my database the ones we subscribe to falling below certain usage levels. I find it useful to get in and look around at the usage statistics. I often see high use in a title we access as part of a uniform title agreement and low use of a title we subscribe to directly. I find very low or no use on titles that don’t appear in our OPAC, and I use this as an opportunity to do some OPAC maintenance. No records? People aren’t going to use it! It gives me a sense of overall usage patterns — subscriptions versus access, for example. I ponder the reason for a low use title suddenly having one month of heavy usage.

My database is “dirty.” Sometimes I get the subscription price from an actual invoice. Other times I get it off the publisher’s website. My feeling is that the price is in the right ballpark. Yet because I don’t have actual prices with any added charges that might appear after we see a year-end invoice, I cannot monitor journal price increase as well as I would like. There are many cases where I threw data into the notes field only to find it was a useful bit of information and needed to dig it out and put it...
A
dopting an ERM system, whether it’s
home-grown or purchased, is not as
simple and straightforward as many
would think. In many ways, an ERM
system is a living, ever-changing and growing thing
that requires upkeep, attention, and, above all
use. In addition, keeping electronic resources
and their increasing growth managed and
transparent to the user is a task that is not an
easy one for libraries.

In 2004, Wayne State University Li
raries purchased and put into operation
an ERM system after a thorough analysis
and research effort. This implementation
was represented in my case study “Select-
ing and Implementing and ERM at Wayne
State University.” In the case study, I
discussed key factors regarding the creation
and execution of an ERM system and the
critical decision-making and goal-setting
process that was involved. More impor-
tantly, developing an ongoing evaluation of
an ERM system is necessary to make sure
that it is meeting the needs of the library.
In the six years since we purchased Inno-
vative Interfaces Millennium, the electronic
resources management at Wayne State
has evolved and improved in our library system
in a variety of ways.

Going through the process of the pre-
liminary analysis and goal setting proved
to be a worthwhile practice. As our ERM
system evolves at Wayne State, we continu-
ously refer to the original goals that were
outlined during the analysis. One of the
library system’s primary goals is to provide
integrated services with enhanced efficiency
to our patrons. This is a goal that continues
to govern our evaluation of a new or existing
service or support for these services.

During our original goal setting, the team
evaluating the need for an ERM came up with
questions that helped to define more of what
the library needed out of the ERM:

- Will we need to hire someone to manage
  the ERM?
- Will the ERM allow us to have more
  functionality with less staff work?
- Will we need a new workflow or e-re-
  source process?
- How much training and time to train will
  be necessary?

It was determined early on that there would
be someone hired to manage the ERM. At the
time, the systems librarian was doing much
of the technical work to get the ERM up and
running but did not have the time to populate
the ERM and handle the general management
of it. The new position of Electronic Resources
Librarian would handle many of the daily
management and work tasks involved with the
ERM, which include creating and populating
the records, as well as updating information.
As the system began to grow, it was determined
that the Electronic Resources Librarian would
be moved from the library’s technology de-
partment to the technical services department.
This move was necessary to place the librarian
closer to the acquisition and management of the
electronic resources.

With the increased use of the ERM by library
staff, the functionality of it has improved, as well.
Although it has not dramatically decreased actual
staff work, it has increased functionality as a
unified place for staff to go to when they need
information for their work tasks. For example,
by having access to information in the ERM, it
reduces the need to email different individuals
for different information. It also reduces the need
to keep and store extra emails, spreadsheets, docu-
ments (paper or electronic) for login, contact, or
administrative information. Most of the staff has
had ERM tasks merged into their job functions.

With the creation of a new electronic re-
source workflow that heavily features the use
of our ERM, the creation and the population
of new and existing records with current data
were an essential part of bringing the ERM
up to speed. These records include access,
statistical, contact, and licensing data that are
vital to other library services. This is important
because the ERM has become more of a time
saver. Problems arise when the records do not
have the necessary data for other departments
to access. These other departments have to
invest more time to track down the information
that they need to carry out their library services.

An example of the integration of the ERM
into other library services is Encore. With the
Encore service and the catalog, the ERM
contains the holdings information and content
descriptions that then display in the catalog.

Training wasn’t too much of an issue. We
had already had other Innovative Interfaces
products, and the ERM was a module that was
added to them. The staff was already comfort-
able with the record display in the system, so
adding new ones that were similar did not add
too much additional time onto training. The
reality is that the staff has decreased their work
in other areas of the library with the process-
ing, ordering, and cataloging of print materials.
The staff has now increased their work with
the ERM with data entry, maintenance, and
management of the information contained in
the ERM records. All of the necessary admin-
istrative data relating to electronic resources are
now centralized in one system.

What we expected and what has worked for
us is that the ERM needed to adapt to process
changes and have growth with flexibility.
We also expected the ERM to optimize and
organize electronic resources management,
which it does. The ERM has also created

---

**We Can Work It Out ...**

*from page 18*

in its own field. The database is flexible, and
it responds to what I need. As incomplete and
dirty as it is, I remember when managing our
journals only entailed checking to see if there
was dust on the top of the volumes or by put-
ting a DEMCO colored dot on the spine every
time it was reshelved! Now I have a variety of
information from usage to indexing to patron
issues to bear on my decisions.

But it would be better to have access to an
ERM that was complete for HSL. Who knows
what patterns I could see if I could easily sort
and review all the data I have indicated for all
of our titles? I would dearly love to be able to
do subject and school reviews of our titles,
something that is just too time-consuming
now.

At the present, Columbia’s integrated
library system contains all sorts of payment
and vendor information but is a challenge for
an infrequent user to use quickly and easily.
Columbia’s ERM is a title list used to maintain
OPAC and link resolver connections as well as
provide access to usage statistics. But neither
system allows me to accumulate the varied
information I need to manage the Health Sci-
ce Library collection.

It also occurs to me that an essential aspect
of a big university EMR, useful to the many
librarians with selector responsibilities, is the
ability to identify the titles for which they are
responsible. If librarians cannot sort and
find “their” titles easily, the system will be of
little benefit. And that is a big problem in a
big university. Fund codes are rife and may
be shared by many selectors. Selectors come
and go, and responsibility by selector name
changes over the year. Sometimes there is an
advantage in the sciences because of legacy
mailing addresses linked back to the delivery
of print issues. That certainly is the case
with the Health Sciences Library, which is
located at a completely different address from
the Morningside campus and has traditionally
been invoiced separately.