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Electronic Resource Management Systems and the Small to Medium University Library: An Argument for Implementation

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In talking with electronic resource professionals (ERP) from around the country, I have come to the conclusion that our professional lives are continually becoming more and more involved. This is partially due to the nature of our primary responsibilities as ERPs. Electronic resources are always changing and evolving, and the ways in which we strive to provide access are evolving as well. In addition, many of us are also assigned a myriad of other duties on top of our primary ones. This may involve reference desk duties, liaison work with a department or department(s), acquisitions work and oversight, as well as many other responsibilities. Due to this fact, ERPs need all the assistance and tools they can get; this includes Electronic Resource Management (ERM) Systems that allow electronic resource professionals to streamline workflows and the dissemination of information to their stakeholders.

An Electronic Resource Management System is a software application that assists a library in tracking the life cycle of an electronic resource. The life cycle of an electronic resource will be discussed in further detail in the next few paragraphs. There a several hundred potential data-points or pieces of information that can be gathered about an electronic resource, and electronic resources now include e-journals, databases, eBooks, and other forms of electronic or digitally-born content. Libraries on the whole are shifting away from print acquisitions and moving towards the acquisition of information in electronic formats. So, the amount of information that will need to be stored, evaluated and easily accessed about a library's resources will most likely steadily increase as time passes.

For those who are not familiar with the electronic resources profession and workflows, every year an electronic resource professional is responsible for ordering thousands of electronic resources; after ordering, each resource must be paid for and activated. Sound simple? Well, add in the fact that these resources are not all ordered at the same time, they come from multiple vendors and publishers, and most of them have to be activated manually — but only after you go through your university's legal department, the dean, the provost, and the president to get their approval for the contract language that you have just reviewed. This becomes even more complicated when someone wants to have

changes made to the agreement, which starts the process all over again. After the ERP has accomplished all of this they have to find some way to check and assure these resources continue to function throughout the year. Once the ERP has accomplished all of this, they need to find a way to gather statistics in a form and fashion that is as accurate as possible and as efficient as possible. This may involve hundreds to thousands of Websites and sets of login information. All of these steps, when put together, complete the life cycle of an e-resource. As a final step, this information must also be input into reports that can easily be accessed and used by stakeholders and for evaluation purposes.

E-resource Life Cycle[1]
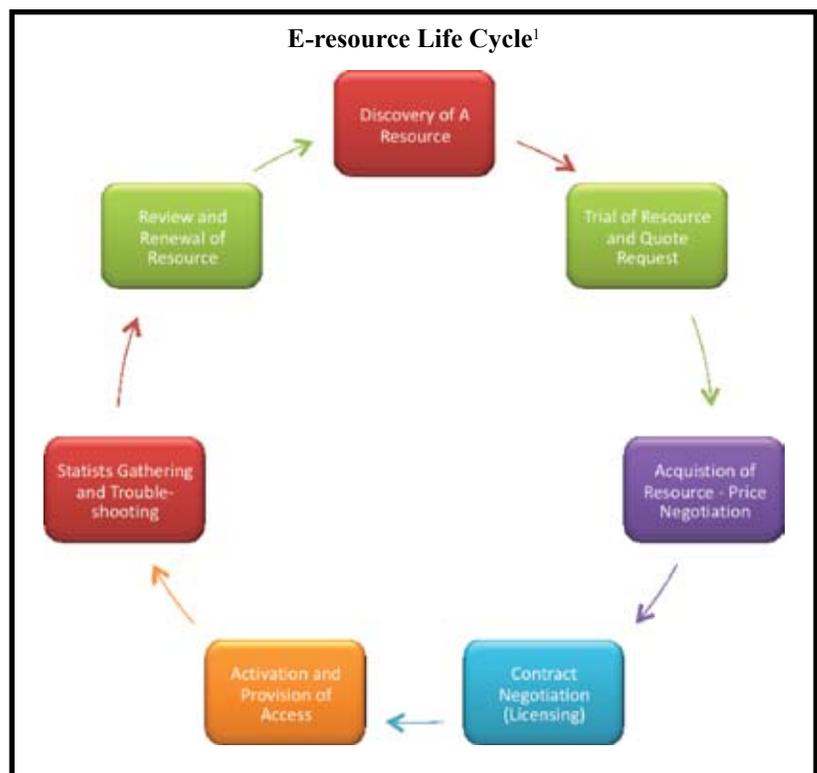
better communication of information across departments. Interlibrary Loan uses it to retrieve very important resource sharing information. Electronic resources licensing information is managed in the ERM with several library departments able to access and use the information that they may need. For example, **Wayne State Libraries** belongs to the **Innovative Interfaces ArticleReach** consortium. **ArticleReach** is a service that depends on having correct electronic resource loan and licensing information in our ERM. Staff that handle **ArticleReach** requests need to access this information in order to make

key decisions on filling that request. The ERM decreased the time that a request is filled by more than half, and this has expanded our ability as a library and an institution to provide services that rely on it. Another example of how the ERM adds functionality is the harvesting of usage statistics using the **SUSHI** protocol which provides reports via the ERM for collection development and analysis.

Although the ERM has met our needs and has adapted with our changes, there are areas that need more work or simply are just necessary to handle manually. When a new electronic resource is acquired by the library, there isn't any getting around manually entering data about it into the ERM. This can take up staff time — not

just one staff member does all of it, but this is time that has been accounted for. The ERM is somewhat slow to grow as an entity in itself. One of the goals that we have met and continue to keep is to have **Innovative's** new releases and upgrades to the entire system; however, this may or may not include new releases and functionality to the ERM.

The future of our system is to keep adding data for new resources and review and modify existing data and to keep the ERM up-to-date with changes that will be needed to keep in line with processes and process changes. It will drive new policy and change current policies. It will always be an asset with implementing new services and features for the library system patrons.

An Argument for Implementation

Licensing resources and tracking the information contained within a license is a time-consuming process that necessitates a large number of faculty and staff hours to manage effectively. There are many constituency groups throughout the library that are concerned with this information. The electronic resource staff uses this information to assure compliance with legal obligations spelled out in each contract. Additionally, interlibrary loan also needs access to the information on a daily basis to inform their decisions on when they can use a digital copy instead of scanning or mailing the print version of the document. As more and more of our journal subscriptions migrate away from print to electronic, this process and access to information will become even more important and potentially more time-consuming for the interlibrary loan departments across the nation.

Tracking renewal and payment schedules is also a very important task that involves the ERP. This task is presently being performed using a variety of methods that include spreadsheets, calendars, email, or they are simply not being tracked effectively. Having the ability to track this information and send yourself or other staff members reminders and task assignment emails automatically, as some of the ERM systems allow you to do, has the potential to save both staff and faculty time. It also ensures that deadlines are not inadvertently missed, resulting in temporary loss of access to a resource or additional fees from vendors and publishers due to late payment.

So how does an electronic resource professional track of all of this information and scheduling of tasks? For many ERPs, the answer is the best way they can with what they have access to. In the case of **Murray State University**, we have a home-grown ERM system consisting of

an Access Database, which I have to admit is not used that often but does contain some of the information that would be managed in a full-fledged ERM system. We also have a myriad of spreadsheets that contain login information and statistics. At this point in time I have also started to use my **Google** calendar to track dates of renewals and projects — when I can find the time to enter them into the calendar appointment template.

There are many good ERM products on the market today that address a large number of the needs that were stated earlier in this article. However, in comparisons to larger institutions, small- to middle-sized libraries have even more hurdles to acquiring and implementing one of these products. Many small- to medium-sized libraries do not have the necessary budget to pay for an ERM system; others do not feel that they have the time or the staffing capabilities to fully implement a system once it is purchased. **Murray State University Libraries** fall somewhere in the middle of these two issues. We do not have the time to implement a system such as **Ex Libris' Verde** or **Serials Solutions 360** due to the need to input massive amounts of information on the uptake. Nor do we want to spend a large amount of money on an ERM system due to the fact that our holdings budget is limited. Additionally, the state and university budgets do not look to be shaping up in a manner that will provide the University and the Library with the possibility for additional funding in at least the next few budget cycles. Despite these issues we are interested in purchasing an electronic resource management system sometime in the very near future.

I had the opportunity of viewing a live demonstration of **EBSCO's** new product **EBSCONET ERM Essentials** in January. **Murray State University** currently subscribes to a majority of our journal content through **EBSCO**, so we are very familiar with the interface of the **EBSCO Journal Subscription Management System**, **EBSCONET. ERM Essentials**

has been integrated into the **EBSCONET Interface**, which allows a certain level of familiarity even before starting to work with the system. Some of the attractive features from the standpoint of a small- to medium-sized library include integration of the system into **EBSCONET**; allowing a supervisor to spend less time training and helping staff to acclimate to a new interface; the auto population of data fields by **EBSCO** if the journal, database, or other electronic resource is purchased from **EBSCO**; and the built-in ability to update links and other information automatically across the library's ERM, **A to Z Journal List**, and **Link Resolver**, if a library uses the **EBSCO A-to-Z** listing service along with **LinkSource**, **EBSCO's** link resolver product. **Murray State University Libraries** currently use SFX for link resolving, but we will be looking into the possibility of migrating to **EBSCO** products to enable us to take advantage of these time-saving features.

When evaluating the purchase of an ERM, a library needs to examine the following criteria: cost of the system and its implementation versus the cost of not implementing an electronic resource management system. This data should be considered along with other information the library has determined germane to the discussion of acquiring an ERM before acquiring a system from any vendor.

In conclusion, can a small- to medium-sized library function without an ERM system? Yes, many of us have been doing so for years, and many of us will continue to successfully provide access to our electronic content without the aid of an Electronic Resource Management System. However, we also face the continual increase of the number of electronic resources we must provide and maintain, and, in many cases, a reduction in the number of staff or the number of staff hours that can be allocated to these tasks. So, when should a library acquire an ERM system? I think the answer is simple: when it is more cost effective to do so. 🌲

Endnotes
1. The **E-resource Life Cycle**. (2006). Retrieved January 1, 2010, from **EBSCO** official Website: *http://www.ebsco.com/ home/ejournals/ejournallc.pdf*.

Rumors

Wow! EBSCO will purchase the assets of the **OCLC NetLibrary Division** and the rights to license a select number of vendor-owned databases currently available through the **OCLC FirstSearch** service. The purchase includes the NetLibrary eBook and **eAudiobook** platform as well as operations and infrastructure in Boulder, Colorado. **NetLibrary eBook** content and **eAudiobook s**ubscriptions will continue to be available on the **NetLibrary** platform. **EBSCO** plans to provide access to the **NetLibrary eBook** content on the **EBSCOhost platform. NetLibrary eBooks**

will also continue to be discoverable through **WorldCat.org**. **EBSCO** has also purchased the rights to license certain vendor-owned databases that are currently available via **FirstSearch**. Existing **FirstSearch** subscribers will continue to receive access to these databases on the **FirstSearch** service through the end of their current subscriptions. In order that customers experience an ideal transition to **EBSCOhost** following the current subscription period, pending approval of database owners, **EBSCOhost** access to these databases will be activated to run in parallel with **FirstSearch** access for the remainder of the current subscription. "Proceeds from the sale of the **NetLibrary Division** will be reinvested in the cooperative, both in financing

current operations to keep our shared costs down for members and in resourcing important new product development," said **Jay Jordan**, President and CEO of **OCLC.** "I am pleased to say that **OCLC** will therefore be able to hold service prices flat on all **OCLC** services in the United States for a second consecutive year, through June 30, 2011." A FAQ for customer and member support, ordering, billing and service transition is available and the full press release is loaded on the *ATG* NewsChannel.
www.oclc.org/firstsearch/content/questions/ support.epnet.com/knowledge_base/detail. php?id=4789.

www.against-the-grain.com/