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Biz of Acq — Navigating a Collaborative ERMS Trail from Planning to Implementation at ASU Libraries

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“He who fails to plan is planning to fail.” — Winston Churchill

Background

Are you still struggling with Electronic Resources Management System (ERMS) implementation? In this article, we share **Arizona State University (ASU) Libraries'** collaborative implementation project and offer recommendations for other libraries that are still in the process of launching an ERMS.

Since the release of the **Digital Library Federation's** Electronic Resources Management Initiative and the first commercial ERMS in 2004, many libraries have recognized the ERMS as a crucial tool to manage the complex life cycle of e-resources. Currently, numerous ERMS options are available, including home-grown, commercial vendor, and open source systems. However, over the years, library surveys have indicated that even after choosing an ERMS, librarians are not fully satisfied with its implementation (**Klusendorf 2010; Silton and LeMaire 2011; Collins and Grogg 2011**).

ASU is one of the largest public research universities in the U.S., with a full-time enrollment of 70,000+ students. In the early 2000s, ASU's President **Michael Crow** introduced a vision of a “New American University” and a centralized administrative concept of “One University in Many Places,” with four campuses all located in the metropolitan Phoenix, Arizona area. The same concept applies to the **ASU Libraries**, having eight branch libraries acting as “One Library in Many Places.” The **ASU Libraries** have an extensive collection of e-resources, which include 500+ databases, 81,000+ e-journal titles, and 364,000+ eBooks, consuming about 78% of the materials budget.

Pre-ERMS History

In early 2006, the **ASU Libraries** had not yet evolved into the “One Library in Many Places” we have become. The four campus libraries were administered by separate directors. Collection decisions, licensing, and access to electronic and other collections adhered to separate policies and procedures. Few collaborative projects among the four campuses had been developed. These disparities between the vision and the reality were highlighted in a workflow analysis report produced for the **ASU Libraries** by **R2 Consulting** in February 2006. The consultants' recommendations included

shared e-resources selection and access, and the implementation of an ERMS.

With that impetus, the first step toward a more collaborative collections model was the appointment of a Collections Steering Council (CSC) in August 2006 for decisions concerning university-wide collection development and management. The eleven-member CSC included representation from all four campuses and from various functional work areas, including collections, acquisitions, systems, public services, and selectors from humanities, social science, and science disciplines. E-resources quickly became the primary focus as resources that ideally should be shared among all campuses. The CSC centralized selection, acquisitions, licensing, access activation, display, and assessment.

Among the CSC's most visible achievements was the construction of a centralized intranet site for new e-resources selection and acquisition. Selectors enter recommendations for new resources and/or requests for format changes following a prompted list of data elements. Requests are then reviewed and voted upon by the CSC, whose recorded decisions automatically funnel requests through various workflows, from license negotiation to acquisition and access. Refinements to the database have honed it into a useful tool for new e-resources, and selectors from across campuses can track the status of their recommendations. However, once a resource is acquired, the utility of this database declines to a repository of past decisions and work. It does not serve as a comprehensive database for ongoing maintenance of all of our e-resources. Management of e-resources from licensing and acquisitions to access and discovery is very complex and extends beyond traditional acquisitions of print resources. To manage our vast e-resources collection, the **ASU Libraries** needed an ERMS.

Planning for the ERMS

As the second step toward developing a collaborative collections model, the **ASU Libraries** analyzed several ERMS products. Since ASU has used the **Innovative Interfaces, Inc. (III)** Millennium integrated library system for several years, and because **III's** ERMS was well recognized, we decided to purchase it in August 2006. Taking heed from

other libraries' experiences from literature reviews, conference programs, and conversations with colleagues, we realized we could not rush to populate the ERMS immediately. The size and complexity of our collection and our organizational structure demanded that we take time for careful and systematic planning before implementation. In addition to integrating our e-resources collections, we wanted the planning process to provide another team-building opportunity to further our goal of becoming “One Library in Many Places.” To that end, Library Administration appointed an all-campus ERMS Task Group of fourteen public and technical services staff to develop best practices for improving discovery services for library users while gaining efficiencies and transparency for library staff.

Following initial discussions about activities, products, and personnel required to bring the ERMS online, in February 2007 the Task Group formed seven Subgroups which recruited more participants from across campuses, libraries, departments, and functional units to plan various aspects of the implementation:

- The **ERM Workflow Subgroup** flow-charted personnel, processes, and tools required to select, license, acquire, activate, and maintain e-resources across all **ASU** campus libraries. Rather than documenting existing processes, they applied past experience to flowchart “ideal” future workflows for new, continuing, and cancelled resources, incorporating new ERMS functionality.
- The **ERM Coding Subgroup** configured all fixed- and variable-length fields available in ERMS resource, license, and contact records to provide brief but comprehensive OPAC displays and to facilitate e-resources management and maintenance by library staff. Some fields and field names were also customized. While using past experience to predict existing needs, they also reserved some fields for unanticipated future uses.
- The **ERM Public Access Subgroup** worked in conjunction with the ERM Coding Subgroup to evaluate different e-resources discovery mechanisms, controlled vocabularies, and public displays that had previously been developed across **ASU Libraries** campuses and recommended a single taxonomic

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scheme and public catalog display for all e-resources.

- The **E-Resources Web Form Subgroup** revised the existing CSC online form for e-resource requests to improve usability and facilitate evaluation of recommended products. They also aligned the new form with ERMS fields to facilitate smooth transition of records.
- The **Marketing Subgroup** recommended procedures for communicating new e-resources to end-users, based on data derived from a literature review, a survey of **ASU Libraries** constituencies, and conversations with colleagues at other libraries.
- The **Staff Training Subgroup** identified training needs for use of the ERMS by library staff and helped coordinate orientations across campuses and constituencies.
- The **Implementation Subgroup** produced timelines for populating the ERMS and its deployment as a management and discovery tool for library staff and users. It also produced an exhaustive 62-page report from each of the subgroups covering all aspects of the implementation, including field definitions and coding, and delivered it to the **ASU Libraries Administration** in May 2007. Finally, this Subgroup validated the Workflow Subgroup's recommendation to create a new position for a 100% FTE professional librarian as ERM Coordinator. This position would oversee ERMS record population, ensure quality control, set and monitor implementation and release schedules, and serve as the functional expert for continuing development and maintenance of the ERMS. The Implementation Subgroup successfully presented a job description and justification for this new position.

Implementing the ERMS

In October 2007, an ERM Coordinator was recruited and appointed from within the **ASU Libraries**, reporting to the head of technical services.

The basic structure of **III's** ERMS has key components, namely resource, contact, and license records. It also includes various features such as Coverage Load, which provides MARC records and holdings data for e-journal packages, and Usage Statistics, which imports usage data sent by e-resource providers. Due to these multiple functionalities and the complexity of the data, the ERM Coordinator decided to implement the module in several phases.

The ERMS Task Group received only very basic training on the record structures for the ERM module, since staff was already familiar with many **III** products and system architecture. The project started with careful review of about 150 fixed and variable fields recommended by the Coding Subgroup to facilitate accuracy in data entry. The first data input step

was to create contact records for e-resource providers, vendors, and publishers, including names, addresses, and other administrative details for technical help, usage statistics, accounting, sales, and so forth. The purpose was to centralize the information, which was scattered in emails, spreadsheets and other files of many library staff and departments. Now all of the necessary data is centrally accessible, regularly updated, and serves as a valuable tool for library staff.

Simultaneously, the work of creating ERM resource records, which contain basic bibliographic information, was in progress. **III** and Libraries systems staff helped in populating data from our previous home-grown system called the "Database of Databases" (DBDB) instead of creating resource records from scratch, which saved a significant amount of time and labor. However, the Coordinator noticed some inaccuracies in data mapping, and such records were updated manually.

Lastly, before making the tool live for users, we added basic license fields such as "Conditions of Use" required by **ASU Legal Counsel**, which states terms and conditions for users, and "Maximum Concurrent Users," identifying the number of simultaneous users allowed. Once the first phase was completed, the ERMS was made accessible for library staff to familiarize them with the records, and two weeks later was released for users in March 2008. During the transition period from the Spring semester through the summer, we kept both systems running to allow time for staff and users to experiment with the new ERMS, and in Fall 2008 the DBDB was discontinued. As this was a major system implementation for **ASU Libraries**, communication was considered a high priority. The Coordinator visited all four campuses and made presentations about the new ERMS and future plans. Also, staff was kept abreast of developments through the Libraries' internal newsletter and Libraries-wide emails.

The second phase of the project started with enhancing license records, as well as implementing the Coverage Load and Usage Statistics features. The implementation of these features required detailed preparatory work. For the Coverage Load implementation, a Resource ID field from the **Serials Solutions (SS)** Knowledgebase was added to each resource record. It was also vital to map the data from **SS's** CSV file to the ERMS by creating Coverage Spreadsheet Conversion Rules in the administrative module to increase the matching rate while importing the data from **SS** to the ERMS. This preparatory work took a significant amount of time, but helped tremendously in cleaning up data within the **SS** Knowledgebase.

The Coverage Load includes two monthly processes, first loading catalog files of MARC records, then loading holdings data in the Coverage Load. The process performs various functions in the ERMS and the online catalog. It creates holdings records and links them to the proper bibliographic record in the catalog.

Simultaneously, it creates and updates coverage information by creating links between holdings records and their parent resource records in the ERMS. These links enable an attractive, informative, and navigable display for our users in the ERMS and the online catalog. Similarly, all linked electronic journal titles from a package and its coverage information are displayed below the resource record. This extends the utility of the ERMS and provides an additional pathway for users to discover electronic journal titles.

For the Usage Statistics feature, each resource record was attached to a corresponding order record to pull payment information during cost-per-use analysis. Preparatory work also required setting up an AutoStat Configuration Table in the ERMS administrative module to import data from SUSHI-compliant providers. This feature is still in a testing phase.

During the implementation, we created a public folder to receive feedback from our users for future enhancements. Based on the comments, we realized a need to revise a very long drop-down ERM subject list with assistance from selectors. The initial list of 171 subjects was narrowed down to 73 to make the ERMS a more user-friendly tool.

As e-resources consume the majority of our budget and form a substantial portion of our collections, it is important to promote these resources to our users. Based on the Marketing Subgroup recommendations, initially e-mail notifications for new resources were sent to core CSC committee members for wider distribution. Later we started making regular announcements through the **ASU Libraries** Weblog, a more efficient communication tool. We also promote our e-resources by other means such as announcing them on the **ASU Libraries** home page; creating placards promoting subject-specific databases in our exhibit areas; demonstrating core resources in instruction classes; and highlighting them in LibGuides created by subject librarians.

Once we procure an e-resource, it is important to maintain seamless access through continuous updating of URLs and other access information. At **ASU**, we have established a HelpStar system, where access issues are reported by our users and addressed by library staff. Although HelpStar is not integrated with our ERMS, we maintain incident logs in the resource records, which provide valuable information during product assessment. We also use various other ERMS public display fields such as "Resource Advisory," to notify our users about downtime or discontinuation of a resource; and the "Requirements" field, for any special software download needed to facilitate access.

Future Plans

Although we have implemented the basic features of our ERMS and have integrated it into our daily workflows, there are more

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tasks we would like to accomplish through the ERMS.

We started populating license records fields during our initial implementation with very basic information, but due to turnover in the Contract Specialist position, distilling license terms into the ERMS is currently on hold. Eventually we would also like to attach scanned licenses to the resource records to provide centralized access to authorized staff.

Currently we maintain usage statistics in a separate database for collection development and assessment. We have tested the Usage Statistics feature in our ERMS but due to discrepancies in the cost-per-use data and labor-intensive preparatory work of converting the files from providers for importing to the ERMS, we have not yet implemented this feature.

We have not yet started using the ERMS for eBooks management, as these collections are still an emerging concept, but have begun thinking about how we might do so. E-journal purchasing models were prevalent and operational when ERMSs were developed. Now that eBook packages are increasingly being marketed, we would like to be able to adapt the ERMS to manage them as well.

Integration of the ERMS with other management tools is a major shortcoming. Even though our ERMS integrates with our ILS, there are some pitfalls in interoperability with other systems. In a survey reported in *Against the Grain's* April 2010 special issue, 94% of ERMS libraries reported they still use spreadsheets to accomplish some e-resources related functions (Klusendorf 2010). ASU Libraries is no exception. We still use a separate intranet

database for performing workflows associated with selecting and acquiring new e-resources. An early idea to write a "crosswalk" script to automatically populate the ERMS from the CSC form unfortunately did not come to fruition. Various **SerialsSolutions** products serve as our link resolver, discovery interface, and A-Z e-journal list. HelpStar is used for reporting and resolving access issues. Excel spreadsheets are used to report database expenditures and usage statistics to subject specialists and to collate statistical data for local and national bodies. Integrating these important tasks into the ERMS would help centralize all e-resources functions into a single system.

We would also like to improve and customize the ERMS's public interface. Currently ERMS vendor enhancements focus on functionality for library staff, rather than improving public interfaces. For example, a tiered approach to display the ERMS subject list, and integration with public-facing applications such as LibGuides, would make the ERMS more powerful, flexible, user-friendly, and well-indexed with multiple points of access.

Recommendations

We took a significant amount of time in our ERMS implementation: fourteen months for planning, then another six months to populate the data before releasing it to our library staff and users. Libraries implementing an ERMS should not underestimate or stint on planning time before launching the product.

Collaboration among various library departments prior to and throughout the implementation process proved very valuable in the success of the ERMS. Including all campuses, libraries, and departments in our planning discussions provided a broad range of foresight and expertise to the experience.

Implementation and continuing development and maintenance of the ERMS are a full-time job. As with many technological innovations, the ERMS has helped centralize information, but it has not actually decreased staff work. It is important to have a designated position solely focused on managing the ERMS and coordinating projects and staff to expand it.

Just as ERMS implementation has been a continuous process, so too has collaboration become habitual at the ASU Libraries. After the planning workgroups dissolved, an ongoing Libraries-wide, multi-campus ERM Task Force was created to continue to address implementation and other issues. A separate E-Workflow Group focused on technical services meets monthly to establish workflow policies and procedures such as in-house and vendor-supplied e-resources cataloging and the implementation of patron-driven acquisitions services. The Collections Steering Council has reformed into several workgroups, including an E-Resource Discovery Workgroup co-chaired by the ERM Coordinator. These collaborative efforts ensure that all stakeholders remain informed of new e-resources developments and encourage continued planning and refinement to the ERMS public and staff interfaces.

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At the Only Edge that Means Anything / How We Understand What We Do

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Google Zeitgeist Report 2011

In the public interest, Google annually analyzes keyword searches which rise to the top of popularity among billions of searches. We learn, for instance, that none of us are especially profound in our search terms. Our keywords look like morse code in brevity and our interests are mundane. Nevertheless, Google divines great meaning in trends like "Justin Bieber" or "J.Lo's rear."

What Google doesn't care to reveal are the millions of other more specific and telling searches. From brilliant to dull, stellar to base-

ment, sublime to trivial — these searches are locked away in Google servers. For Google's eyes only.

For librarians, this isn't good, right, or helpful. Google Analytics, geared to our own users, would form the holy grail of knowing. With just an ounce of this data, we could transform our own search tools and practices to provide our users with data and research that would easily trump claims made by open access as far as "knowing" goes.

We can imagine similar keyword data collected by other search giants like Yahoo, Bing, and Ask. We wouldn't need personal information, simply the same sanitized data they've gathered for "better more personalized searches."

Google's Zeitgeist is our Zeitgeist. It's both a public utility and good.

Your links:

<http://www.google.com/zeitgeist/>
<http://www.bing.com/community/siteblogs/b/search/archive/2011/11/28/2011trends.aspx>

Branding 101 for Librarians...

What's in a name? A few of us may ponder this each time we land on Yelp, Twitter, or even Google. Facebook makes sense, sort of. **Apple** or **Amazon** — well, they benefit from their position in the sort; for who among us can resist names that start off the alphabet? Librarians

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