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Biz of Acq — Implementing a Shelf-Ready Workflow at UMBC



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Context and Rationale for Investigating Moving to a Shelf-Ready Workflow

In the fall 2015 after a year and a half, the Technical Services Department in the **Albin O. Kuhn Library & Gallery** at the **University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC)** had a working shelf-ready processing workflow. To reach this point, had been a truly collaborative endeavor involving not just staff in Technical Services but input from other departments within the library as well as working with the systems staff at our central technical office, Digital Stewardship and Services (DSS) at the **University of Maryland, College Park**, who manage our consortium's ILS.

Beginning in the spring of 2014, we began exploring the possibility of implementing a shelf-ready workflow for our print books. Many organizations decide to move to shelf-ready processing to help relieve pressures for overloaded staff or in order to continue processing materials at the same rate but with fewer staff. When we began investigating, we were not expecting high staff turnover. In fact, one of the main motivations in investigating the possibility of implementing shelf-ready processing was if we could automate the processing of many of our orders, then staff might be able to shift focus and spend time on tasks that could not be automated, such as special collections materials, or providing descriptive metadata for digital collections.

After the proposal to implement a shelf-ready workflow was approved by the Library Director and the library's management team, work began on completing the necessary tasks to set it up with **YBP**, our vendor. This was a multi-step process with the first step being to provide the necessary specifications. Because of the vigilance and expertise of our Acquisitions Librarian and Catalog and Metadata Librarian, we were able to successfully navigate this part of the process.

Physical Processing Specifications

YBP provided a laundry list of physical processing services. Each step incurred an additional cost, so the goal was to identify the most broadly useful minimum of processing. Materials that required processing that varied from this common denominator were either excluded from shelf ready or the processing was altered to fit. Special Collections materials were excluded from shelf ready as processing varied too much from the common denominator. Reference materials were added to the shelf ready process by changing former practices to match the common denominator. Focus on the useful minimum of processing for shelf ready materials also provided the opportunity to streamline physical processing steps for all circulating materials. Including date due slips and date of receipt stamping inside the item increased the cost of shelf ready processing. Excluding these steps for shelf ready items allowed the decision to discontinue these steps for all circulating materials.

With the steps to be performed listed out, a **YBP** supplied questionnaire required that the details of location, number, and other variables be specified for each of the steps. Tasks performed with little thought on a daily basis by a variety of staff needed to be written out and specified in great detail. The exact location for barcode placement required that the cover, the corner of the cover, the distance in two directions from edges of the cover all be identified. Barcode placement specifications also needed to remain within the acceptable range required by a self-check-out kiosk in circulation. Property stamping required a similar level of

detail on location(s), with the addition of font size and ink color. Call number labels probably represented the ultimate in detailed physical processing specifications. Type of label stock and font were only the beginning. Call numbers included both prefixes, such as collection codes, and suffixes, such as volume numbers, and both needed to be listed accounting for all allowable variations. Instructions on the line by line parsing of the **Library of Congress** Classification numbers for the labels ran to many sentences. Scans of existing spine labels were included to supplement and clarify the textual descriptions.

Cataloging Specifications

Unlike physical processing, the options for record selection or cataloging treatment were few. Here the decisions rested upon how complete a record was desired. At the point of processing the physical item, **YBP** would choose "the best available **OCLC** record" that matched the item for download into the catalog. This was the floor for the vendor provided service. For an additional charge, **YBP** would provide at least one subject heading and a complete call number, if these were lacking in the best available record. An additional level of service offered a more complete record. In the event there was no matching record, options included supply no record, a brief record, or increasingly complete records. Some of these levels of service would not support spine label generation, and the goal remained to have the maximum percentage of materials ordered via this program come as shelf ready. In the end, a level of service that provided sufficient information to generate spine labels was chosen over the most expensive level. This decision seemed the most cost-effective decision, assuring the highest percentage of ordered materials would arrive with labels at the lowest possible cost.

Serial issues with a distinctive title represent a small percentage of purchases, but a substantial wrinkle in cataloging decisions. **YBP** provided support in this area by offering the option to supply a brief record when a serial record was the best record available. The decision on record choice would then become a local one. This option was chosen, as well as deciding that serial issues would not be ordered via shelf ready. An additional service was offered to allow for local decisions on class together series. This would be particularly useful if an institution did not follow the **LC** practice with a series title. **UMBC** uses **Library of Congress** Classification and attempts to follow **LC** practice for series titles, so this option was not of interest.

Understanding Workflows

At the time when we were implementing shelf-ready, we had a pre-existing **YBP** **GOBI** workflow. When orders were placed, **YBP** sent Electronic Order Confirmation Records (EOCRs) to our central technical office, Digital Stewardship and Services (DSS) at the **University of Maryland, College Park**, and they loaded these records into our shared ILS. The loader for this workflow utilizes existing bibliographic records when present, attaching an order and an item record to them. We provide the ILS system number for the bibliographic record that the order and item should be attached to in the specified **GOBI** field. When there is no existing, matching record, the loader creates a new bibliographic record based on the information in the EOCR, and creates an order and item attached to it. Values are mapped into the order records from **GOBI**, and all items are set to be in the stacks collection, with an

continued on page 75

item status of “on order.” If necessary, the collection is changed later based on notes mapped from GOBI into the order record. When items are shipped to us, **YBP** sends EDI invoices to DSS, and they load the invoices, attaching to it the orders created when we placed the orders. All the **YBP** materials that arrive go to one staff member, who receives them and sends them on to a copy cataloger.

We knew from the beginning that not all items would be ordered as shelf-ready, so we would still need this workflow. This meant that we would have two **YBP** workflows: shelf-ready, and not shelf-ready, and that the technician placing the orders would have to choose the appropriate workflow at the time of order. Each workflow would be associated with a particular sub-account, and the sub-account selected at the time of order would determine if an item would get shelf-ready processing or not. Items going to special collections would not get shelf-ready processing, because they get special processing, in that nothing is permanently attached to the piece. Serials issues ordered as books also wouldn't get shelf-ready processing, to allow for decisions on treatment. Finally, replacements would never be ordered shelf-ready, as these could result in a variety of database cleanup situations. The staff member who receives **YBP** materials would need to have two workflows and two procedures, one for materials not ordered shelf-ready, which she'd receive and pass on to a copy cataloger, and another for items received shelf ready, which she'd eventually theoretically be able to receive, check for a record match, and send to the stacks.

Our new shelf ready workflow would work like our existing workflow, up to the second pass load that happens when items ship. For this, DSS would develop a new loader for us, based on an existing **University of Maryland, College Park** loader that loads shelf ready records. This new loader, referred to as the second pass loader, varied substantially from our existing loader. We came to an understanding of how it worked through observation after it was in place. In the existing workflow, we receive EDI invoices, but in the shelf ready workflow, MARC records come with invoice data embedded, and the loader utilizes the embedded data to create invoices. The first pass loader matched records via the system number we provided in the order. The second pass loader looked in the system for an **OCLC** number matching the **OCLC** number in the bibliographic record provided by **YBP**. In some instances, **YBP** would provide a different bibliographic record for the second pass than the one used by the first pass loader. This meant we now had two bibliographic records in the system, and two orders representing the same item and a single purchase. Fortunately the DSS staff produces an array of very detailed loader reports that assisted in identifying and correcting these situations.

Implementation and Troubleshooting

Implementation occurred in quick steps after all the account set up, programming, loaders, and contracts were in place. A first set of orders were placed, a first batch of final cataloging records were sent, and loaded into test. When the actual items arrived, the Acquisitions Librarian checked the invoice against the items and the Catalog and Metadata Librarian reviewed the items against the records in test. During the review of the cataloging, issues for follow up were identified both for **YBP** and the local loader. In response, **YBP** made corrections, but these could only be tested with the next batch of orders. DSS staff modified the loader, and reloaded the records into test, so this fix could be tweaked and adjusted prior to the placing of another batch of orders. Both **YBP** staff and the DSS staff cooperated fully and responded in a very timely fashion over the course of about two months as issues arose. The first couple of loads were run into test, reviewed and then moved over into live. After these few loads, all future loads went automatically into test then live with no review between.

One of the most useful tools for identifying and tracking issues were the local loader reports generated by the DSS staff. There are separate reports for each loader. Among the details these reports provide is information on the creation of items, holdings, orders created, and serial records that are loaded. If the number of records, items and orders did not match in the first pass loader report, this would be a signal that there was a problem with the load. If orders were created during a second pass load, this meant that there were now two orders in the system for the same item.



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As part of the implementation process, the first several batches of records items were received and copy cataloged using the new combined procedure. The staff person who had been doing the receiving and some copy cataloging in the past executed the new procedure. These batches were reviewed by the Catalog and Metadata Librarian to identify issues requiring follow up beyond the skills of the staff person. The issues became a problem sheet used by the staff person. When these issues were encountered in the combined procedure, the problem sheet was marked to match, and the item was kicked out of the workflow for problem resolution by the Catalog and Metadata Librarian. Marking the sheet saved time in problem resolution, and highlighted frequently occurring issues that might be solved by investing time in other solutions. Some frequently occurring issues were fixed by requesting loader changes, system record validation changes, and procedure changes. Conversations between the staff person and the Catalog and Metadata Librarian also led to productive tweaks in the procedure that saved time and steps. Overall, this stage of implementation was treated as a work in progress with frequent conversations, and encouragement of suggestions.

Outcomes and Future Plans

Implementing a shelf-ready program took much longer than we expected so that benefits in terms of noticeable changes in workloads and workflows have been slow to materialize. Hopefully, the data we gather will help us make the case for continuing. At the very least, with the majority of the print book orders being processed through the shelf-ready workflow, the hope is that we can shift the priorities of staff to materials that require more time and expertise to process. Looking ahead there might be opportunities to process some of our non-print materials via a shelf-ready workflow. While we may have been a little late to the game for establishing a shelf-ready workflow, as we gather data to evaluate the program, it is still affords us an opportunity to work efficiently and make the most of the knowledge and skills of our staff. 🌱