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A Peek Inside Vendor/Library Partnership to Establish a Firm Order Workflow Through a Consortial Migration

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Introduction

The **California State University (CSU)** system is one of the largest public higher education systems in the United States and includes 23 institutions, largely comprehensive universities, across the state. Within this state system, the **CSU** libraries have been cooperating on collections building and have shared technology services through the Chancellor's Office (CO). In June 2015, the contract was signed for **CSU** libraries and the CO's libraries supporting the division to migrate to **Ex Libris'** Alma and Primo as part of the Unified Library Management System (ULMS), where some of the principles in moving toward a shared integrated library system (ILS) and discovery environment were to increase collaboration and share cost savings.

The **CSU** libraries went live with Alma and Primo in the summer of 2017. For those working in technical services, the possibilities to centrally manage consortiumally licensed resources as well as share bibliographic records in Alma's Network Zone (NZ) at the consortial layer meant new opportunities to collaborate across the libraries and new ways to re-think workflows. The migration and subsequent implementation of an unfamiliar ILS intimated that it was going to be necessary to come up with consortial policies and best practices within the **CSU** libraries, but also required close partnerships with vendors to establish workflows and integrate systems to gain efficiencies. The special issue on "Vendor Library Partnerships" in *Against the Grain* highlights the importance of this symbiotic relationship and stresses the common "vision" vendors and libraries share to "provide access to the world's information in order to create new knowledge."¹ The **CSU** consortial migration proved that collaboration within the consortium as well as with vendors is a necessary requirement to execute this vision.

GOBI Library Solutions from EBSCO (GOBI) operates through a territory system where Library Technical Services (LTS) representatives work with libraries on various technical service projects such as migrations, opening day collections, workflow automation, shelf-ready services, and any needed training sessions to support service set-ups. Having one individual working throughout the region on all institutional projects helps provide best practice information to current customers and allows for multi-campus projects to have a common representative working with individual institutions on a variety of levels for consortial integration.

As different vendors offer different degrees of support and feedback mechanisms to understand a library's individual structure, having a regionally appointed representative with the understanding of multiple libraries can lead to better understanding of library technical service trends, best practices, and needs. For example, although most libraries have unique set-ups, there will often be other institutions with similar needs, and vendors can be a source of information to other library contacts for best practices, or new ideas. A customer who has completed implementation and has been using a service for some time may have advice for libraries looking to set-up a similar service. A regionally placed vendor representative willing to assist with cross library communication can, with permission, provide contact details or responses to the libraries that are working on service implementations.

Libraries and vendors collaborate on technical services automation and migration projects. **CSU Fullerton**, as part of the larger ULMS consortial migration, worked closely with the regional **GOBI** LTS to implement a workflow that avoided duplicating record fees in the new environment where bibliographic records are shared consortially. System migration projects are time and labor intensive, and, depending on the scale of the project, setting-up the vendor profiles and system testing can take months to coordinate. It is critical to

get in contact with vendor representatives well in advance of the migration in order to have a smooth transition, discuss timelines, and form best practices. It is also equally important to maintain those communication channels during and after the migration to troubleshoot any issues as they arise.

Choosing a Firm Ordering Workflow

Locally at **Fullerton**, there was very little integration connecting the former ILS, Millennium, to other vendor systems, nor to the **CSU**-wide financial system, PeopleSoft, in the acquisitions work area prior to the migration. Thus, there was a lot of duplicative work being done to align acquisitions information in various systems in the form of data entry. The migration was viewed and utilized as an opportunity to update legacy practices and take advantage of the functionalities offered in a new ILS to streamline both local and consortial acquisitions workflows. **GOBI** is the main vendor supplying materials in the English language or published in predominantly English-speaking countries to **Fullerton**. **GOBI** supplies one-time and standing order titles to **Fullerton** via the approval plan, firm orders, DDA, and ongoing standing orders. **Fullerton** uses **GOBI's** shelf-ready services and works with **OCLC** to get full bibliographic records for the approval and firm order titles ordered through **GOBI**. Most of the **GOBI** orders supported local collections building efforts. For the purposes of this discussion, the focus will be on optimizing the use of the LTS and the available **GOBI** options to establish a firm ordering workflow.

GOBI customers with Alma as their ILS have three available firm order workflow options to choose from. During the migration process, a library would work with a **GOBI** LTS representative to learn more about the available workflow options, select a workflow, and have the workflow implemented in their Alma environment. This process can take several months depending on the length of time the library needs to select a workflow and the complexities of a library's account structure within **GOBI**. The three available firm order workflow options are GobiAPI, GobiExport, and Electronic Order Confirmation Records (EOCR). It is important to note that each workflow option is part of **GOBI's** library technical services, and both the GobiExport and the EOCR workflows have "Plus" and "Basic" versions. The GobiAPI currently has only one version most analogous to the "Basic" version in terms of the bibliographic data provided. For the sake of simplicity, this article will focus solely on the "Basic" level workflows for Alma libraries.² All the bibliographic information in the "Basic" level records for all three firm ordering options are capitalized and are easy to visually identify in the system.

The GobiAPI firm ordering entails the library placing an order directly in **GOBI** and through the API set-up, a brief bibliographic record that includes order details is provided to a library's Alma system (Institution Zone (IZ) vs. NZ is based on a library's Alma system settings). Through the transfer of information, **GOBI** obtains Alma's purchase order line (POL) number for each title in an order, allowing for the POL to be a match point for any downstream services such as cataloging or Electronic Data Interchange For Administration, Commerce and Transport (EDIFACT) invoicing. With the API, the library does not need to connect to **GOBI's** FTP server to obtain the brief bibliographic records. Of note, the brief records are not MARC formatted nor are they available for easy access to the library as the API is a traditional mechanism to automatically feed metadata into a library's Alma system. Specifically, the API build specifies what **GOBI** information is placed in each corresponding section of Alma. The resulting file is a X12 file generated for the server to read. These files are only accessible by a developer on the **GOBI** server. Files with

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errors generate an error report by Alma and an error report is sent to **GOBI**.³ Upon receiving an error report, **GOBI** representatives reach out to the library to help resolve the errors.

The GobiExport firm ordering workflow⁴ operates as follows: the library places titles into an “export” cart online in **GOBI**’s interface and batch exports MARC files with bibliographic information and the Embedded Order Data (EOD) either through **GOBI**’s file area or through **GOBI**’s FTP site. The export files are usually available within five minutes of initiating the export and the library would then load the files into Alma using an import profile that loads the EOD files, generating POLs for individual titles and item records for print materials. The import profile(s) would set needed default values and/or map pertinent values to the local data indices, and either immediately or on a scheduled job, the library’s ILS would “package” the POLs and send back EDIFACT orders to **GOBI** on specified subaccounts. The packaged orders would contain various information from the export records and Alma about each ordered title.

The EOCR firm order method involves: the library placing orders directly in **GOBI** and a brief bibliographic record is provided to the library through FTP the next business day after a library places the order. The library then uses an EOD load in Alma to pull in the brief records from **GOBI**’s FTP server. The EOCR records are MARC formatted records that have the bibliographic information and contain the order detail information the library provided at point of order. The EOCR workflow uses the vendor order number also known as the **GOBI** order key as a match point for downstream services.

The ULMS migration at **Fullerton** necessitated a thorough understanding of all the available options with the help of the **GOBI** LTS. Each one of these workflows have different set-ups with **GOBI** and Alma, allowing for institutions with very different needs to have a variety of options to choose from. But each chosen workflow has implications on subsequent workflows, especially because acquisitions is one of the first steps whereby records get created and/or loaded into the ILS.

Prior to the migration **Fullerton** subscribed to **GOBI**’s EOCR service but this workflow required an added order acknowledgement data transmission process in a Millennium environment. Therefore, the EOCR service for Alma was quite different. During the migration planning stages, **Fullerton** opted to utilize the GobiExport service with the recognition that the bibliographic records will be shared at the consortial level and governed under the consortial bibliographic management policies⁵ as well as begin the EDIFACT electronic invoicing to improve the invoicing workflow. Neither of these two services were previously implemented at **Fullerton**.

Within the CSU libraries, there is a varied landscape on the **GOBI** ordering workflows across individual campuses and there were a few institutions that went live directly with the GobiAPI service in the summer of 2017, which aligned with the CSU consortial Alma go-live date. **Fullerton** opted for a more conservative approach for establishing firm ordering procedures. After reviewing all the options, in consultation with the **GOBI** LTS and other colleagues utilizing Alma and **GOBI**, **Fullerton** implemented the GobiExport option in order to have more direct control over the timing of when the brief order files will be ready, better manage the orders before they are sent out from the system, and still be able to batch ingest records by exporting EOD bibliographic files from **GOBI** and loading them into Alma.

Discussions

All Alma users will have an IZ and have access to the Community Zone (CZ). Local information, records, and inventory will live in the IZ while the CZ is a knowledge base for electronic resources, can serve as a catalog, and stores community authority records. Consortial Alma users will have the added benefit of utilizing the NZ, which hosts shared bibliographic records and facilitates the central management of consortially licensed electronic resources. The CSUs initially populated the NZ based on gathering the attached holdings information of every CSU library in **OCLC**. There is currently a daily **OCLC** feed that continuously refreshes the NZ with any adds, updates, and deletes of CSU libraries holdings in **OCLC** to maintain currency of bibliographic data.

In this shared bibliographic space comprised of universities with similar missions and somewhat overlapping purchasing patterns based on the collections review in GreenGlass, the Acquisitions Librarian prior to the migration envisioned scenarios where two or more institutions would initiate orders for the exact same resource that would utilize the same bibliographic record in the NZ. The consortial migration already necessitated a close communication with the **GOBI** LTS since the majority of **Fullerton**’s firm order purchases were transacted through **GOBI**, but **Fullerton** also wanted to put in place a workflow whereby it would be possible to avoid purchasing the same bibliographic record that others have already purchased within the consortium.

The main CSU system’s funding comes from the public; more than half of CSU’s revenue is from the state of California through its taxpayer

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contributions and a major portion of the remaining funding is through the collection of tuition fees. The distribution of state funds initially trickles out through the CO, which then filters to the individual campuses, and continues to subdivide to the various colleges and administrative units. It is the responsibility of acquisitions professionals to “strive to ensure good stewardship and maximum value of the institution’s resources” according to ALA ALCTS’s “Statement on Principles and Standards of Acquisitions Practice.”⁶ Since most of the CSU libraries’ collections and/or operations budgets ultimately come from the same source, as a steward of public funds, the original thought process behind implementing GobiExport at Fullerton was to design an ethically-minded financial workflow where public funds were not expended for the exact same product more than once, if possible.

Fullerton contracts with OCLC’s WorldShare Collection Manager (WCM) service through GOBI for full bibliographic records of titles purchased via GOBI’s approval and firm orders. It is possible to create bypass subaccounts with GOBI for firm orders so that resources purchased under this type of an account would not result in an automatic purchase of a full bibliographic record.⁷ Purchases made under the bypass subaccounts would however also result in no physical processing, so Fullerton essentially forfeited shelf-ready services for a portion of their firm orders in favor of attempting to ethically steward public funds.

In addition to the GobiExport firm ordering workflow outlined in the previous section, at a more granular level, Fullerton’s acquisitions record import workflow includes the manual review of bibliographic records if there is a match in the NZ. Alma has matching algorithms built into the import profiles predominantly based on bibliographic records matching on MARC fields 02X and 035. When the GobiExport files with EOD bibliographic records are loaded, if there are no matches in the system, then the EOD bibliographic records would load to the NZ and create the POLs and item records in the IZ. But if the loads included matches, an acquisitions staff would utilize the full bibliographic record already in the NZ and flip the subaccount to a bypass subaccount in the POL, which would avoid triggering a purchase of a full bibliographic record through WCM.

Fullerton’s fiscal year runs from July 1st to June 30th and, over the span of the two fiscal years 2017/2018 and 2018/2019, there was a total of 2,537 firm orders placed with GOBI, 624 electronic and 1,913 print. Out of the 2,537 GOBI firm orders, 600 firm orders total were placed on bypass subaccounts, 16 electronic and 584 print, meaning nearly 25% of firm orders were ordered without full bibliographic records or shelf-ready physical processing in two fiscal years. This process allowed for the customer to select and use certain subaccounts for different purposes, ultimately putting the control on technical services outsourcing usage on the library.

Upsides

Having a single vendor representative that was knowledgeable about workflows across the entire consortium was helpful in getting a sense of the diversity of workflows. From the financial perspective, there were cost savings as Fullerton avoided purchasing bibliographic records that had already been purchased by another member of the consortium. There was also an informal assessment of the cost to physically process the materials in-house with student labor. At optimal production with varying degrees of complexity in physically processing where the students were paid at minimum \$12.00 per hour in 2019, it took the students one to three minutes to apply security device, apply two stamp impressions, apply barcode, scan barcode into the ILS, then generate and apply the spine label. Having in-house physical processing of materials was significantly cheaper than outsourcing that activity to a vendor. The physical processing factor obviously does not apply to electronic materials but Fullerton is an e-preferred campus so the benefits derived from using existing bibliographic records in the NZ for e-books might be better realized in the future as there are increased purchases of e-formats on the bypass subaccounts.⁸ From an ethically principled stance, if funds were allocated to state institutions in a

shared environment, at least for firm orders, Fullerton avoided paying for the same exact product if another CSU library had either already spent funds on the record itself or devoted staff time to cataloging or copy-cataloging activities.

The GobiExport and EDIFACT ordering workflow provides CSU Fullerton with more complete control over the ordering workflow by allowing for brief bibliographic records to be uploaded to the ILS before orders for resources are placed. This amount of micro-managing of orders can be a successful cost savings option for libraries wanting a mixture of outsourced shelf-ready services with the flexibility to completely bypass outsourcing. Fullerton’s GobiExport service along with the GOBI firm orders import profiles set-up by the Acquisitions Librarian ensured that in situations where there is already an acceptable full bibliographic record in the NZ that adhered to local cataloging standards, the records were utilized. From a purely financial perspective, the quotes for the EOCR and GobiExport services at the “Basic” level were comparable while the GobiAPI service was quoted at a higher rate than the other two, even with the CSU consortial deal for the GobiAPI. Furthermore, the implementation of GobiExport cut down the lag time in loading the EOD records from one day to immediately when switching from the EOCR service to GobiExport, significantly improving the discoverability of newly purchased items right away.

Downsides

GobiExport and EDIFACT ordering workflow is more time and labor intensive for the library because it requires more steps to order a title than GobiAPI and it does not fully utilize the automation technology Alma and GOBI are capable of. Although nearly 25% of firm orders were ordered on bypass accounts over the span of two fiscal years, the WCM fees charged were modest and the workflow was not the most efficient way to acquire materials using Alma. The ordering work at Fullerton is done by Library Services Specialist ILLs, who typically “perform more complex or specialized [...] library duties to support daily library operations and/or programs,”⁹ and therefore are compensated for their labor at a rate higher than entry level employees. Due to the layered workflow for GOBI firm ordering, it required staff with more experience to handle the work but could introduce more human errors. The ordering workflow could be optimized if the ethical stance could be overlooked, especially since specialized labor costs far outpace the cost savings from purchasing bibliographic records.

Conclusion

This is one of the many conversations taking place across libraries, vendors, and consortia. More work needs to be done to fully understand the optimized or non-optimal workflow trade-offs and re-imagine how it could be enhanced in the future. Having a 360 conversation with vendors and librarians working at various ends of consortial work is one way to start the assessment. Through a close partnership with the GOBI LTS representative, Fullerton was able to implement a system that bypassed duplicate purchasing of bibliographic records. But for those interested in simulating a similar workflow, it would be recommended to look at the costs and efficiencies as they pertain to the cost of services, cost for labor, cost savings, steps involved, and the time it takes to perform the full GobiExport firm ordering cycle, while balancing the ethical conundrum of managing public funds. It would also be interesting to find a more efficient solution that could scale consortially.

The overall workflow resulted in a GobiExport option at Fullerton that allowed the flexibility to utilize the bypass subaccount structures whereas consortially some sister campuses preferred the GobiAPI. Through close partnership with GOBI’s LTS representative, the project to update institutional technical specifications had a common representative working with individual institutions on a variety of levels for consortial integration and for Fullerton to be able to enact a system that bypassed duplicate purchasing of bibliographic records, which was the desired outcome. Although it is not yet certain if the benefits fully outweigh the downsides, the migration not only resulted in consortial collaboration across the libraries and the CO employees but formed a close alliance with vendors to flesh out the workflows behind the scenes and re-visit existing infrastructures with a new lens framed by the ILS. 🌱

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Streamlining Workflows: Combining In-House ... from page 36

as necessary. Create a space for employees to voice their concerns. This can be done via group meetings, regular one on one check-ins, or in casual conversation. Also, when implementing a new policy or procedure, follow up with your staff to see if the new procedure is working well. Document your steps and progress along the way. Sometimes the smallest changes can have a much bigger meaning to staff than to managers.

Staff: Ask questions and provide feedback. Not everything that you suggest to your manager may be acted upon immediately, but it may spark ideas for long-term or other improvements. Be willing to give a new workflow or procedure a try to see how it goes. Also, be patient with your managers as they test out new workflows and look for ways to make improvements.

Closing

There is no single tool or solution outlined in this paper that could have solved our issues alone. Our overall increased productivity is the result of many changes working together — as proud as we are of the macro and the savings we have achieved, we are equally proud of the ways we have responded to suggested changes from members of the Cataloging and Processing team and from the Library staff as a whole.

Outsourcing continues to be an integral part of our workflow, but we have found that it is important to regularly evaluate what specific tasks are currently available for outsourcing and their effectiveness

in our workflow. We made a conscious effort over the last two years to reframe our relationship with outsourcing so that we may provide better customer service and so that our staff feel less vulnerable and more confident of the value they bring to the system. The additional services we have been able to offer in cataloging and processing allow us to highlight in-house talent and skills. Outsourcing felt like a threat for many years, but now it is a tool to facilitate quick delivery of customized cataloged and processed materials — we can allow vendors to handle highly repetitive tasks so we can turn our attention to in-depth customizations, services, and projects that benefit our local community.

Resources and References

1. **Hahn, Joel.** OML for the complete beginner. <http://www.hahnlibrary.net/libraries/oml/lessons/index.html>
2. **OCLC Online Computer Library Center.** OCLC Connexion Client Guides: Basics: Use Macros. https://files.mtstatic.com/site_10606/5158/0?Expires=1572016244&Signature=QO~xW5wUvhs3rJYyHpcFmHSUIEG-0Ti9hX-Q5V1rAiFRVOSxgranOqzmUGRLJktvTRqVcDzUFbD-C4hLMc1yuxYqfE-9oyeliQk7tzhE3YITeEk8VJdAGg-7-IF-ZILGdDkN8actm93ZkoQqdnXAfVDeLa7pPg-SIFiyzBaOt-vJKw_&Key-Pair-Id=APKAJ5Y6AV4GI7A555NA
3. **John Lavalie's macros.** http://www.ccslib.org/Catalogers/index.php/John_Lavalie%27s_macros
4. Writing **OCLC Connexion Client Macros** the simple way! <http://computerwhizzard.50megs.com/OCLCconnexionclientmacros.html>
5. **WaltsMacros.** <https://github.com/wnickeson/WaltsMacros>

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Endnotes

1. https://www.against-the-grain.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/ATG_v30-2-1.pdf
2. Libraries seeking more information about other levels should connect with their GOBI representatives for more information; The LTS may also help the library with setting-up their ILS system to work with GOBI, for example, helping with Embedded Order Data (EOD) load tables, best practice information on how to set-up the Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) vendor profile for GOBI, and optimizing the library's GOBI-Alma workflow timing.
3. An example error would include issues with matching cases on fund codes or fund codes without properly allotted funds in a library's Alma system.
4. The GobiExport workflow was originally developed for Innovative Interfaces, Inc. customers who were not able to use a vendor order number as a match point.
5. <https://calstate.atlassian.net/wiki/spaces/ULMST/pages/61112885/Policies+Best+Practices+Procedures>
6. <http://www.ala.org/alcts/mgrps/as>
7. Libraries would need to set-up a bypass subaccount with GOBI prior to utilizing this functionality.
8. Fullerton manages GOBI purchased eBooks locally instead of in the CZ.
9. http://www.calstate.edu/hradm/classification/R09/Library_Services_Specialist.pdf

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publishers and their interactees, primarily on matters relating to digital change or the supply chain. I enjoy reading his blog which I don't do enough! Check out one of the latest — **2020: Zero year thoughts about the changes in book publishing** — <https://www.idealogy.com/blog/>.

Audible has finally settled the lawsuit over its speech-to-text feature, Captions. In July, **Audible** announced Captions, claiming it will be geared toward students as an educational text accompaniment to its audiobooks. Publishers were immediately up in arms, declaring it a copyright issue, arguing that **Audible** only had licenses for audio-use, not text. While **Audible** insisted that its service was not a replacement for eBooks, publishers took the issue to court, where it has been stewing since August. *The Guardian* reports that "the parties had resolved their disputes and expected to submit the settlement documents by 21 January."

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/jan/15/audible-settles-copy-right-lawsuit-publishers-captions>

Speaking of **Audible**, I have been riveted by listening to *The House of Morgan: An American Banking Dynasty and the Rise of Modern Finance* by **Ron Chernow**. This is from **Amazon** and is very accurate in my opinion: "Published to critical acclaim twenty years ago, and now considered a classic, *The House of Morgan* is the most ambitious history ever written about American finance. It is a rich, panoramic story of

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