FEATURE

How to Select a New ILS/LSP Vendor

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What is most important to this small, autonomous law library when prioritizing its needs and wants for a new ILS? To start, that means a knowledgebase to optimize access to law-specific databases, a cloud-based and maintenance-free server, the ability to streamline workflows through system functionality, a mobile-friendly and user-friendly interface to maximize patron satisfaction, and ongoing customer support and training without being cost-prohibitive. The list of must-have functions and services can be a mile long in a process this complicated.

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How does a library decide what missing features are deal breakers? This is difficult in an industry with rapidly changing technological capabilities and at an institution that's handling significant restructuring and a shortage of staff. In this article, we discuss how our library has begun the process of selecting a new ILS and our plan to continue the selection process in 2018.

Who We Are

The Joel A. Katz Law Library is an autonomous academic law library supporting the mission of the University of Tennessee College of Law. It provides access to the traditional law school databases for use by law students as well as resources for the Knoxville community. We serve approximately 400 law students, 35 College of Law faculty members, seven faculty librarians (including the associate dean for library and technology), 47 staff members, and alumni with limited access. When possible or desirable, law librarians negotiate licenses allowing campuswide access to electronic resources. A working relationship exists with the main campus library that facilitates this initiative, which lets the 28,000 undergraduate students at the university use our resources. Like other libraries, we have faced the challenge of justifying positions within our staff that were once indispensable. Over the last 2 years, we have lost two full-time faculty positions, including our head of collection management, and two full-time staff members who worked as catalogers. These losses have made our need for an efficient, simple, and easy-to-use ILS even greater.

Current Digital Infrastructure

The ILSs of yesteryear were designed and developed to enhance the findability of print resources located within a brick-and-mortar establishment. Now, these systems, library services platforms (LSPs), manage a variety of collection types, including digital collections, through the unification of numerous modules and services. In 1997, the librarians at the Joel A. Katz Law Library implemented a cutting-edge ILS. The system contained modules for circulation with a course reserve component, cataloging, acquisitions with electronic data interchange (EDI) capability, serials management with claiming and binding functions, and an online, text-based catalog. As the ILS vendor upgraded platforms and modules over time, the library migrated to the newest versions without

hesitation. To offer access to electronic resources, librarians oversaw and negotiated the integration of other systems into the digital infrastructure.

As a result of these upgrades, our current system is a complex organization of products, including two proxy servers. One server is for law-only resources, and the other is managed by the main library for campuswide access. Both libraries use the Lightweight Directory Access Protocol (LDAP) to validate off-campus access to restricted resources. In 2011, the law library purchased a mobile interface and implemented an electronic resources management (ERM) component to assist with handling the growing number of databases. Three years ago, the librarians implemented a discovery service, complete with an OpenURL link resolver, from an outside company to exploit a maximum number of full-text resources. Most recently, we retired our on-site server and moved our data to a cloud-based storage environment, which is hosted off-site.

While we are generally happy with the ILS we are currently using, there are options that could assist us in streamlining our workflows. This knowledge, coupled with the rising cost of maintenance and training, prompted our library administration to formalize the idea of investigating ILS options. In August 2017, a team was assembled to identify and appraise those options.

Decision-Making Process

The team created by the library administration includes the associate director of the law library, the head of technical services, one of our three reference librarians, the digital resources librarian, and our acquisitions supervisor. Members of the team began the process with a literature review, a needs analysis from staffers, and a custom questionnaire to potential vendors. In choosing our vendor options, we paid close attention to those that attended last year's annual American Association of Law Libraries meeting, particularly those that serve small to midsize libraries and have received positive reviews from colleagues at other libraries. The main University of Tennessee library system has recently implemented a new ILS platform and its accompanying discovery service. Our administration has asked the team to include this system as a potential option. The timeline for our decision-making process works out to roughly a year, with the hope of beginning the implementation process by July 2018.

ILS/LSP VENDOR OPTIONS—OUR SHORT LIST

- ByWater Solutions' (Koha)
- Ex Libris Group's Alma/Primo
- Lucidea's SydneyEnterprise
- OCLC's WorldShare Management Services

Criteria for Selection

Our team is reviewing three proprietary LSPs and one well-established and supported open source system (OSS), based on the following criteria.

Open platform — As a first priority, we want our new system to be open. Even the proprietary systems we are evaluating are all open; they employ robust APIs that allow dynamic interactions and interoperability between systems. Examples of API uses include the ability to authenticate users, integrate ebook-lending platforms, and connect to learning management systems, accounting systems, ecommerce systems, and online ordering platforms. Hence, these systems are open rather than closed, isolated systems. In contrast, true OSSs—and we are evaluating ByWater Solutions'—allow developers to freely use and modify programming code, leading to highly customizable system design. While the programming code in these systems is free, there are costs for implementing, training, updating, and problem-solving within a highly tailored design.

SaaS — We also need our new system to be secure. In the last year, our on-premises ILS server was compromised on two occasions. Both times, it began sending spam email through the university's email system. As a result, Microsoft blocked the IP address, and we were warned by the university's IT department that this problem could not continue. Repeated breaches and a shrinking staff bolstered our decision to move this server to

a hosted (SaaS) environment. This solution has worked well for our library, and we wish to continue using this model. In addition, we want to have updates pushed out in a multitenancy fashion, with all staffers receiving the same version at the same time, instead of installing new versions on individual workstations.

Knowledgebase or interoperability with a discovery service — Our library implemented EBSCO Discovery Service (EDS) 3 years ago, and we have been very happy with that decision. However, we recognize that interoperability between EDS and certain ILS programs is unlikely. To ensure that we see the same knowledgebase functionality, we have designated four features that we wish to maintain, either through continuing our relationship with EDS or via a new discovery service.

First, we would like to continue using human-indexed subject fields, as our reference librarians and patrons prefer the precision that indexed fields allow. Second, we are looking to maintain the ability to rank certain databases above others, leading students and faculty members to the most desirable resources and results. Third, we want to be able to incorporate campuswide resources obtained by the main university library into our search results. This lets us exploit select resources already available to the university. Fourth, we need an OpenURL link resolver that allows continued access to full-text journal links, including content enrichment such as cover images and book reviews.

Access to a knowledgebase will likely be a major factor in our decision-making process because two of the four companies we are considering do not offer a knowledgebase within their system. However, of those two systems, one company does allow for integration with EDS.

Administration and maintenance costs — Affordability will also be a serious consideration for our team members. The library administration asked us to prioritize lower annual maintenance costs as a deciding factor. Also, we must consider the initial startup costs, annual subscription costs, additional charges for system updates, and training costs (in the startup period and beyond). Some fees are not upfront and will be unavoidable, including employee time spent implementing and learning the new system and determining new procedures and workflows.

In our investigation, we asked vendors about the determination of annual maintenance costs. Answers to this inquiry were surprisingly varied. One vendor explained that collection size and annual circulation are determining factors to maintenance costs. Another vendor stated that there were no annual maintenance costs, but additional subscriptions to services are often needed. A third company said that an annual support and maintenance program is included in the SaaS subscription at no additional cost; it is calculated as a percentage of the applicable product's list price at the time of sale.

Implementation and support — The first part of the customer-support process will begin as soon as a contract is signed. To that end, we asked our potential vendors how much assistance we could expect during the implementation process. All vendors were committed to a successful implementation with defined plans for success. While this migration is still a daunting task, the confidence with which vendors handled our questions made everyone on staff more optimistic about making a change.

In our investigative process, we hoped to learn about modes for contacting vendor customer-support services, about customer-support hours, and if a method is in place to track help-desk requests. All vendors offered 24/7 support (telephone, email, and online). Two offered an online form for submitting support tickets. One responder had Internet Relay Chat (IRC) as an option. Another vendor provides ongoing, automated searching every 5 minutes to ensure system response and connectivity.

Training — An ILS provider's success at our institution will also depend heavily on ongoing training and the associated costs therein. Our ideal ILS vendor will provide ongoing training with a minimal or no extra charge, especially with regard to rapid system developments. While all vendors in our consideration provide online training—both live and recorded—at no additional charge, on-site training extending beyond the initial implantation services was generally not included in the annual costs.

Streamlined cataloging processes — Since 2013, the number of ejournals and ebooks we subscribe to has increased 116%. We use multiple tools and workflows to manage the processes of updating the catalog, holdings data, and EDS. First, staffers use FTP to transport files from the vendor server to the local desktop. Then, they use Marc-Edit to manipulate and normalize the catalog records and Microsoft Excel to manipulate coverage data in

the form of CSV files. Finally, they use separate ILS functions to import both data types. In addition, three times a week, staffers export our catalog to update EDS, ensuring it is an accurate representation of our holdings. We wish to relinquish these burdensome workflows with system integration.

In our investigative process, we learned of platforms that did not require importing and exporting data to maintain catalog and discovery integration. For example, one vendor incorporates EDS as an overlay, and two others offer catalog integration with their own discovery options.

ERM — As the size of our digital collection grows, a thorough ERM program is increasingly important. We need our ERM to assist in the selection, acquisition, access, maintenance, and evaluation of resources. In particular, we would like a strong system to track important dates for trial offers of resources that we are considering for purchase and one that allows for the tracking, updating, and storing of licensing agreements. The ability to make global changes to system data is also desirable.

Traditional functionality and workflow — We reviewed the availability of traditional functional areas. Some have newer names, such as "fulfillment" in place of "circulation" functions. All platforms provide varying degrees of functionality for acquisitions, authority control, cataloging, circulation, and serials. We found that interlibrary loan (ILL), ERM, and course reserves—core academic functions—are not directly available from all vendors. One vendor supports an open source ERM and offers the option to connect to an external ILL system.

An important function in any academic library setting is the online catalog. For our new catalog, we are looking for a user-friendly interface that's completely compatible with mobile devices. We also want advanced search features (such as "Did you mean…?" offerings in the case of misspelled words). Three out of four of the vendors surveyed provide such a function, with the fourth reporting the feature is in the development process.

Additional functionality — Various vendors offer many options for additional functionality. Some of these choices include custom reports, digital asset management (DAM), materials booking, data display designers, portal designers, and social networking capabilities. Advanced features that are especially attractive to us are reference request and tracking systems; interconnectivity with other campus offices, such as the bursar's office and the admissions office; single sign-on authentication capability; and self-checkouts with automatic renewals.

Conclusion

At the time of this writing, we are deep in the trenches of our selection process. The results of our staff survey gave us a sense of what really matters to the people who will work with this system on a daily basis. In contrast, the answers we received from vendors let us know which of our needs could be met within current library system technologies. Somewhere between those two sets of data is the perfect LSP for our institution. While budget constraints may prohibit some of our most ambitious desires, we are confident that we will find a system that streamlines workflows and offers quality service and support while providing a user-friendly environment on both the front end and back end. The next step in our process will be to ask for pricing quotes from the vendors who fit our needs best. We look forward to exploring our options further and are hopeful the July 2018 target for beginning the implementation process will be met.

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