

Here in Wales all the universities, NHS libraries and the National Library have taken a bold leap into the future by purchasing a shared LMS and web discovery layer. After an exhaustive tendering exercise ExLibris' Alma & Primo were chosen and last week my institution went live. As part of implementation we were advised by the Company to review our workflows and throw off the shackles of custom and practice imposed by our old LMS.

So rubbing my hands with glee, I designed a very simple flow chart of what our cataloguing workflow could look like. I should explain that I am 0.8 of a post and rely on assistance from 2 frontline staff, campus copy cataloguers, who help when they can be spared from their contractual duties. In practice this means that I do not expect to see them during vacations or the first 6 weeks of the autumn term. In addition to cataloguing new stock I had flagged up the need to accommodate special collections cataloguing; devise a cataloguing workflow for serials; review the records for the newly created Welsh collection; and assess the cataloguing options for eResources. All of which would of course enhance the user experience and raise the profile of the Institution.

I had read a lot about the functionality that Alma offered but worried that our legacy data just wasn't up to the job. After all, systems are only ever as good as the data in them and even top-of-the-range products can't produce a five star search experience based on poor quality or non-existent metadata.

So quite a few projects to undertake if we are to reap the benefits of the massive investment in the system and use it to open up collections not just to our students and academics but our partners in WHELF and beyond. To do some, or all of this, we needed to free up time.

By my reckoning cataloguing efficiencies could be gained from:

- Full EDI with shelf ready so that our Academic Librarians could fill a basket on the suppliers' website and we could purchase full level catalogue records to overwrite the brief records created by the quotes files.
- The ability to search only for full level records from the list of external search resources that we have access to via Alma, in order to plug record gaps for shelf-ready or enhance records as part of project work.
- Limiting searches to RDA records in external search resources.
- Securing access to good quality serials records, print & online, for enhanced discovery and access.
- Top quality eBook records to ensure discovery and access of expensive eResources and aid FRBRisation in Primo.
- The option to switch on RDA templates for original cataloguing.
- Access to updated Library of Congress name authorities and subject headings to make the appropriate connections between resources residing in the collections.

It was only when I started looking at what was actually possible within the system that I realised that there are gaps in provision.

But it's not about whether one LMS is better than another. It's more about how our working practices have changed and whether systems (not just LMSs) have evolved to mirror our quest for efficiencies.

So what of my ideal workflow?

1. Full EDI

Is achievable and will be implemented in the next year or so but when we speak of full level records for shelf-ready what do we actually mean and is what we want, expect and need actually available?

A standard textbook probably doesn't challenge record vendors to produce the goods.

However we have a substantial art collection. Despite purchasing "full level" records as part of a small shelf-ready project with a specialist art supplier, I still do a lot of manual editing to increase the chances of users retrieving the records. I want those extra name entries for curators and galleries. The art world is quite incestuous and the corpus of an artists' work can include not just their works in various media but also their curating activities and essays written about their peers or the artists who have inspired them. Lots and lots of linkages. A summary is also useful as are content notes. My firm belief is that this information needs to be embedded in the MARC records. Commercial enrichments are fine but none of them are comprehensive and web discovery layers behave quite differently with regard to indexing the information for retrieval.

So an important part of reviewing the cataloguing workflow for full EDI will be establishing how full we want our full level records to be; whether a vendor can produce them to that level; and how much will it cost?

2. Refining searches for records from external datasets based on record level.

This is not possible in Alma and wasn't possible in our previous LMS. If I'm searching for a record to import I want the best available. Isn't this what we would all be looking for? But I don't know if any library management system can accommodate this type of search refinement. It may seem a small point but every second spent sifting through records on various databases could be more usefully employed dealing with original cataloguing!

3. Ditto limiting a search for records compiled to either RDA or AACR2 guidelines or rules.

I do wonder how difficult it actually is to construct a query against 2 specific positions in the LDR tag to enable a search restricted by record encoding level or descriptive cataloguing form.

4. Sourcing good quality records for serials.

We have a lot of work to do in upgrading our print serial records.

Probably a really quick and easy way for us to do this would be to start contributing our records to SUNCAT. We have been a bit hesitant to do this in the past, not knowing if what we had to offer could be ingested into the database. Because I'm a bit of a Jack-of-all-trades when it comes to cataloguing I always check the records in SUNCAT anyway because it's like standing on the shoulders of (serials cataloguing) giants.

It's also important to step up to the mark and help SUNCAT to expand the national holdings database.

For eResources we used to be ProQuest 360 Marc customers with Summon as our discovery layer.

For eJournals I had no concerns. We aspired to CONSER and knew that behind the scenes records were continually being sourced on our behalf. We still have access to CONSER records in Alma and we can always "Tell ExLibris" if we need a record and there isn't one in the Community Zone. We definitely will need to do more analysis to find out what the best strategy is going forward.

5. Sourcing good quality records for eBooks

Initially we had started loading eBook records direct from the vendors into our catalogue but as more were purchased and no extra cataloguing resources were available we started relying on the eBook records in the SUMMON knowledgebase. Suffice to say that the range and differing quality of eBook records meant that clever match and merge processes didn't always work. It was frustrating to see 4 or 5 records for the same eBook appearing in search results.

So is Alma any different? Well, it really depends on what workflow you adopt. If like us you choose to rely on records in the Alma Community Zone for eResources (eJournals and eBooks) then it's fair to say that your users search experience will be variable.

Sometimes the records are good but they can also consist of just a title. I was disappointed by the lack of consistency because it directly impacts on search and access and in particular trips up the nifty FRBRisation feature in Primo. But with hindsight I think I was naïve to expect a marked improvement. I completely get the complexity of maintaining knowledgebases but perhaps more transparency around what, if any, quality standards are applied to records before they are loaded would aid decision-making. I think that the perceived lack of quality standards applied to web discovery layer knowledgebases is one of the biggest problems in information retrieval. But at least in Alma we have more control now over which records our users get to see.

So, what to do about eBooks? Start taking records from vendors again, load them locally and point Primo at these for discovery; or continue as we are and lobby for the records to be improved in the Community Zone; or, as a consortium, contribute records to a Network Zone and point our Primo instances at them? (I'm not even sure that this last one can be done for all kinds of reasons but if you don't ask you don't get!)

The beauty of the Community Zone is that ExLibris handle the maintenance. This was highly attractive to us as our current method of administering electronic resources is fairly cumbersome. Being able to record information pertaining to purchase, access and licencing in Alma is fantastic and knowing that the Company will be maintaining collections and ensuring access via the link resolver is definitely a plus BUT if the poor quality metadata is then going to prevent the resources from being discoverable?

I put together a simple document illustrating the problem of poor, minimal metadata and its effect on search in Primo and sent it to one of our eBook vendors. My hope is that this provider will contribute their full level records to the Community Zone which means that potentially all their customers, who are also ExLibris customers, will get the benefit. Then we have to encourage other vendors to follow suit.

6. RDA Cataloguing Templates

The original cataloguing work at my institution is quite specialised. It consists largely of off-air recordings, artists' book and exhibition catalogues with self-published sports coaching titles thrown in for good measure. I had hoped that we could make the jump to RDA cataloguing with the switch to Alma and so was surprised to find that RDA templates are not available out-of-the-box.

I can create them myself but our previous system had the option to switch RDA templates on so I was surprised to find this option missing. It would also be useful to be able to run normalisation processes to produce RDA records against sets of AACR2 records within Alma. Maybe the demand for these features hasn't reached tipping point?

7. Authority Control

It was an easy decision for us to leave behind our messy, long neglected local authority name file. The subject headings slid into oblivion years ago! It is nothing short of miraculous for me, with my limited knowledge and experience of authority files, to be able to start again by linking to the centrally maintained Library of Congress files in the Community Zone. One of the best of many excellent features in Alma.

I know that there is work to do on tidying up headings in our older records but it puts a spring in your step to know that you have a fighting chance of future-proofing records to ensure discovery via linked data initiatives. So that was my first stab at redesigning our cataloguing workflows and come the summer I'll be reviewing them again as we prepare for full EDI and look at the consortial opportunities for purchasing records and maybe even creating our own Network Zone here in Wales.

It's certainly been liberating and revitalising to review our options and at least put together what I consider to be an ideal cataloguing workflow even if some of what I want isn't yet available.

I don't think that any of it is unachievable but it will require negotiation and commitment on all sides. It would be interesting to know how often systems and record vendors review their workflows and I for one would welcome any information that they wish to share on this topic.