

COMPLETE COVERAGE OF LIBRARY INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

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MAKING
SEARCH BETTER
FOR PATRONS

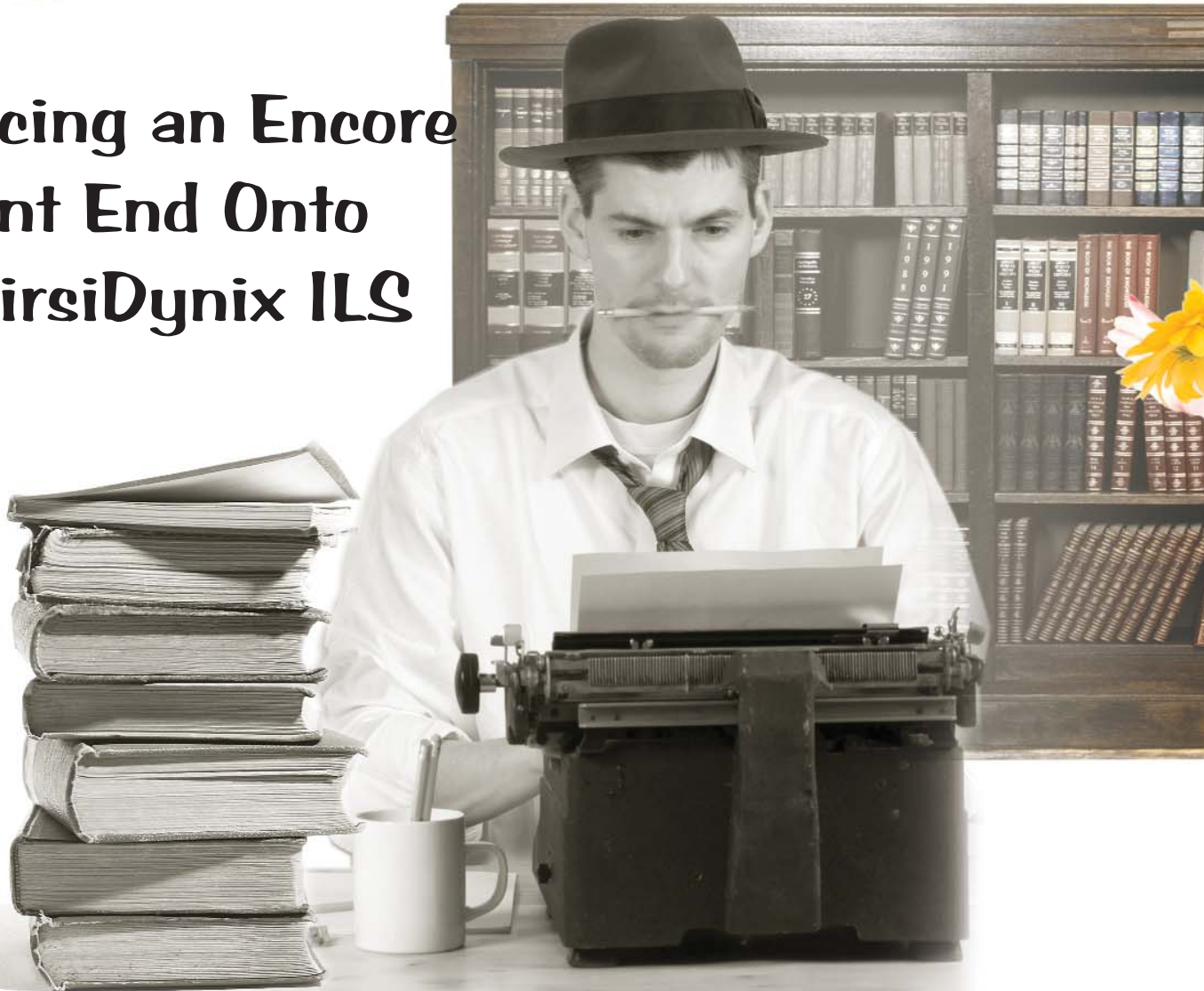
MAY 2008

OPAC: The Next Generation



OPAC:

Placing an Encore Front End Onto a SirsiDynix ILS



Over the last few years, there has been a wealth of materials written and presented on next-generation library catalogs. These next-generation interfaces strive to turn “standard” integrated library systems (ILSs) into more nimble and robust search platforms that offer more user-friendly 2.0 enhancements for users. Rather than abandoning one ILS in favor of another, libraries are increasingly opting to put a new face onto an existing ILS by choosing from

the variety of vendor-created products and placing one of these atop a native ILS interface. In comparison with the time and impact of a complete ILS replacement, this option is meant to leverage the technical expertise of the vendor to quickly and efficiently provide the library with a “better” catalog.

In the summer of 2007, staff members at the DiMenna-Nyselius Library at Fairfield University undertook a study of next-generation library cat-

alogs, which was inspired by the director of library services and the university librarian attending vendor demonstrations at ACRL 2007. We looked at a wide array of products available at the time, and our final choice was Innovative Interfaces, Inc.’s (III’s) Encore. The DiMenna-Nyselius Library is the first SirsiDynix library to implement an Encore system. As such, we are in a relatively unique position to comment on the intricacies of such a project that merges

The Next Generation

by **Susan
Marcin**

and **Peter
Morris**



two disparate systems. This article will touch upon the evaluation and selection processes we went through when choosing our next-generation library catalog. It will also offer some points to consider in making the leap.

Evaluation Process

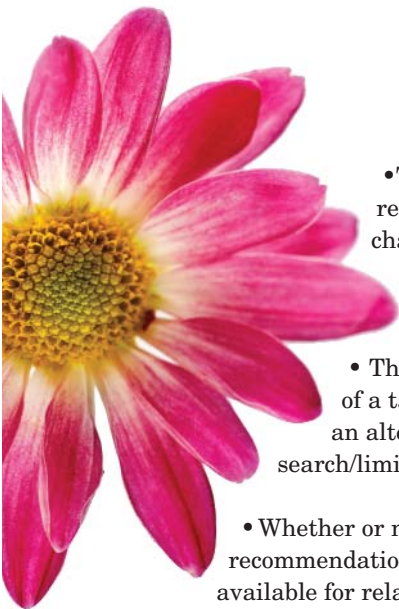
In evaluating products, our goal was twofold: to choose a product that would provide the most benefit for students and faculty and, at the same time, to en-

hance the library's instruction program. The library's digital services and technology planning department began by evaluating several products, each presenting different approaches to enhancing the search functionality in an ILS. We looked at available products on the market, including AquaBrowser, Encore, LibraryThing for Libraries, WorldCat Local, and an unlaunched SirsiDynix entry into the next-generation catalog arena. After the initial review and product recommendation, a

written analysis was shared with library staff members across all departments, and further opinions were solicited.

Further comparative research involved listing all of the criteria that a next-generation library catalog should possess in the minds of various library staff. This wish list contained characteristics such as the following:

- "Did you mean?" suggestions for spelling errors



- The ability to refine results by characteristics such as date and format
- The presence of a tag cloud as an alternate search/limit interface
- Whether or not recommendations would be available for related materials (i.e., if you liked this, you might also like ...)
- Advanced search capabilities (including Boolean logic and phrase searching)
- Whether item status and call number information would be directly available in the results list
- The ability to mark records for export and printing
- The inclusion of federated searching for library databases
- Easy access to other sites and services, such as ILL, My Account, statewide union catalog, etc.
- The ability for users to rate, tag, or review materials
- Seamless integration with the main ILS so users would not need to navigate away from the next-generation product into the main ILS
- Use of record uploading for technology staff and/or catalogers
- Ease of customization (colors, layout)
- ADA compliance

These features, and others, were mapped out on a spreadsheet and the products compared. We consulted vendor websites, attended presentations, scheduled vendor demos, and queried other libraries. Also in the summer of 2007, coinciding with the end of our discovery process, Marshall Breeding published a timely issue on “Next-Generation Library Catalogs” in *Library Technology Reports*, and we compared our research with his findings (*Library Technology Reports*, Vol. 43, No. 4, July/August 2007). Though there may be more recent developments in what vendors are presently offering since its publication, Breeding’s issue presents a well-researched product comparison and offers a great starting point for product analyses. After exhaustive research, there were two front-runners: Encore and WorldCat Local.

In terms of integration of library services, WorldCat Local stood out with its seamless access to ILL, local collections such as CONTENTdm and union catalogs, and OpenURL linking to articles. In terms of record transportability, WorldCat Local offers patrons an individual account with the ability to mark, create lists, add notes to items, share lists with others, export and print lists, export directly to RefWorks, cite items with built-in citation styles at the item level, link to items with built-in durable URLs, which is great for direct linking from webpages, course pages, etc. In terms of item status, WorldCat Local offers real-time circulation details within its interface. WorldCat Local offers built-in advanced searching. Items in WorldCat Local have action buttons that adapt to meet the needs of the situation as dictated by the search results. For example, the button might switch between an OpenURL link to access journals and a Request Item link for a book result. In terms of incorporation into the web, WorldCat Local users will experience a similar look and feel when they access Open WorldCat records from Google or Yahoo! as they

will in using WorldCat Local from the library website. Plus, the added bonus to incorporating all library holdings into WorldCat facilitates drawing in users from the web. However, many library staff members felt that WorldCat Local had too “wordy” a look to it. WorldCat Local *appeared too much like a traditional catalog*.

Encore just felt
right when searching.

In comparison to WorldCat Local, Encore integrates some library products and services with OpenURL linking and local collection searching. This integration is available on its demo interface, and some libraries also have it in place, but this seems to be dependent on what OpenURL provider a library is using. In terms of record transportability (i.e., marking and exporting), this is not available in the Encore interface. The item status in Encore is dependent upon how regularly data is uploaded to it. However, once updated, it is reflected instantaneously. In terms of advanced searching, Encore links to the native ILS for advanced and Boolean searching, removing any added features such as tagging and facets in the search results. In terms of action buttons, Encore has pop-up windows for reviews, summaries, and tables of contents. Though the overall Encore interface did fare well when tested using screen-reader software, Encore’s Ajax pop-ups did not appear to be ADA-compliant in a screen-reader test. In terms of incorporation into the web, Encore holdings will not come up in web searches. This lack of discoverability could be seen as a negative by libraries that are interested in sharing the hidden content of their OPAC on the open web.

In the final analysis, to improve its position as a contender in the next-generation catalog marketplace, WorldCat

Local could benefit from having “Did you mean?” suggestions, graphics (book covers, etc.) on results pages, and a tag cloud. However, implementing any of these features would present little difficulty. There was concern among some library staff that MARC records changed on the local system might not be reflected in WorldCat Local, and some did not want to lose this valuable information. To improve its position, Encore could benefit by providing seamless advanced searching in its interface, record transportability, real-time item status improvement, a more seamless interaction with other library services, and seamless interaction with the web. However, at the heart of it, these appear to be two vastly different products with different goals in mind. A library might not even need a native ILS interface if it used WorldCat Local. The WorldCat Local interface is fully developed—a library could abandon its ILS and rely on a basic (perhaps open source) inventory system for circulation and acquisitions. Encore is not designed with this goal in mind. It is not meant to replace the native ILS but instead to enhance it.

So Why Encore?

The overwhelming choice by the library staff was Encore. Despite some of the technical features of WorldCat Local, staff members were won over by the user-friendly, visually appealing design of Encore’s interface. Encore just felt right when searching. We knew that its elegant design would elicit the same enthusiasm from our patrons. Also, there is the promise from Innovative Interfaces for continued enhancements to Encore, and, as a development partner, our staff will have a unique opportunity to assist in evaluating and designing the user experience. This opportunity is extremely appealing to library staff members across departments. Encore matched the library’s focus, which was, and still is, to maximize the ROI and discoverability of library materials.

Integrating Two Disparate Systems

The seamless integration of two disparate systems, such as III and SirsiDynix, presents unique challenges and considerations for any library looking to undergo such a project. It is important to remember that the companies are competitors, and there are nondisclosure agreements that have to be carefully maintained. In practical terms, this means that your systems department will have to provide the solutions for extracting the data from one system to the other. Remember that this data exchange is an ongoing task. Ask beforehand what data the department needs initially and what data it will need incrementally. Ask about planned features and what data will need to be provided for these features to be implemented. While there may be a roadmap for III to implement features on a Millennium system, the route to that feature may be barred on a SirsiDynix or other competitor’s system.

Data In, Data Out

It is important to understand what kind of data your current system can provide, as well as the kind of data a new vendor will need. It is crucial to speak to the people who will actually work with your data, as the sales staff might not be able to provide the necessary specificity. For the most part, III is requesting MARC records with holdings attached in the 999 field(s). Initially, a master file of bibliographic, item, and serials holdings records must be loaded. After that, changes to the database must be reported to the vendor in order to keep your two OPACs in sync. The periodicity of these files is dependant on how out-of-sync you are willing to let your data get between the two systems. In our case, a nightly update was agreed upon. III asked us to provide these “delta” files in the following categories:

- Added and updated bibliographic and item records
- Added and updated holdings records
- Deleted bibliographic records
- Deleted item records
- Deleted holdings records



Thanks to SirsiDynix’s robust data access features, provided by its flexible API, we were able to provide these files. If you are a Unicorn library and do not have API-trained staff, it might be necessary to have custom reports written by SirsiDynix. Other library systems should acquaint themselves with the procedures that are native to their platforms. The generation of the initial load of records was realized by issuing a single command with a few strategically placed switches. These initial files were transmitted to the III site, where they were parsed and loaded into the Encore database. The “delta” addition and update files for bibliographic, item, and holdings records are also generated by piping a series of API commands to eventually produce MARC record files for transfer to Encore.

Providing delta files of deleted records is a little more difficult. In many database systems, once a record is deleted, it is gone. The Unicorn system is no exception. You will have to consider the process on your own system to gauge how this will work. For instance, do bibliographic records get deleted when the last item record is deleted? Is there a trail left to show what has been deleted? Although there are several different ways libraries are dealing with these issues, we found the easiest way for us was not to allow library staff to delete item, bib, or holdings records. Instead, staff members are instructed to

move the defunct items to a “discard” location. In Unicorn, this location is “shadowed,” or masked, from the OPAC. Since the record is not actually deleted, we can query on the current location “DISCARD” and generate a list of deleted items for that day. After the file is produced and transmitted to the Encore site, we can delete the records from the local catalog by way of a scripting mechanism.

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and patrons to look with
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In addition to being able to produce these files, the local system administrator should understand the mechanisms for scheduling their generation and delivery to the vendor. For our system, the generation of data requires scheduling tasks for the Unicorn report facility and placing cron jobs. Since FTP is not really designed for scripting, a facility such as NcFTP, Kermit, or similar software must be called upon to send the files to Encore on a regular basis.

Be aware of any weeding projects or other major changes to your collection before you start trying to gather these files. In our case, the circulation department has been pulling books from the shelves and replacing older paper bar codes with more durable ones. Hundreds of books are changing daily. If you are unaware of the extent of such projects, the files you generate might look skewed at first glance.

Faceting Data Issues

Remember that the next-generation look is just another face for your cataloging data. It can also have the unintended consequence of pointing out inconsistencies in your data or perhaps showing where data needs to be cleaned up. If you do not want MeSH headings, or if you have identified a list of junk or deprecated tags in your collection, the new interface might make what was previously barely noticeable become exaggerated in a large-font tag cloud! Of course, these can be cleaned up after the fact, but if issues like this are suspected, it is best to clear up as many as you can before you export the records.

Get your staff members and patrons to look with a critical eye at whatever interface you choose, and try to envision and spell out what is important to them when faceting data. We found out after the fact that there was a basic disagreement regarding

the extent to which we should facet material type. Media librarians know that their patrons are very

interested in immediately searching by format. Very specific facets such as DVD, VHS, or Blu-ray are often important for patrons. Others contend that too many media formats might be confusing in an academic setting where quality and quantity of information are more important than format. Both of these perspectives are valid, and, as of the writing of this article, we are still working out the best way to present this data. Out of the box, Encore displays facets for format from the codes contained in the 06 position in the leader. The illustration shows the de-

fault labels for these facets. Sometimes these are not all that helpful, as all of the aforementioned media formats would be assigned “g” or “Projected Media,” which is initially displayed as “PROJ MEDIUM.” We could have elected to simply change the wording to something more appropriate for these format facets. However, Encore allows us to be more creative in choosing where the data for these facets can be derived from. The item fields in

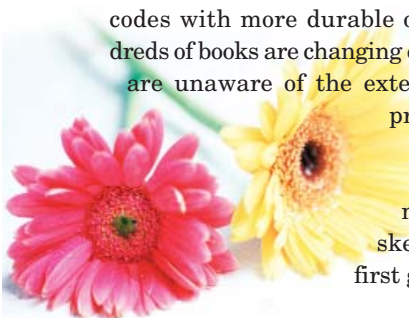
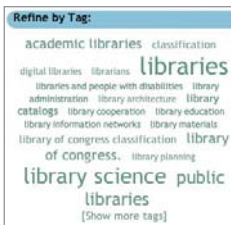
the records we provide include the item type code from our Unicorn system, so we can elect to group on specific items such as DVD. Or if we want to, we could



group DVD, VHS, or any other video format into one facet. The bottom line is that there is no correct answer, and only an iterative process of continual testing and tweaking will bring about the most useful groupings and presentations for our users. To this end, we plan to closely monitor users’ reactions to the new system by implementing studies of its usage.

Conclusion

As a first step toward gathering user feedback, we plan to launch a brief survey in order to collect impressions when the product is first unveiled. A small incentive, such as entry into an iPod raffle open to university affiliates, may be offered for taking the time to answer five or six general questions. Our experience with past surveys of this type has yielded some valuable insights. Follow-up surveys and impressions of the service as conveyed to the reference and circula-



tion staff will also be used to shape how our data will be presented. We look forward to working with the staff of III to further enhance our interface to meet the needs of our users.

As with any technology project, detailed planning is necessary (measure twice, cut once). And knowing the capabilities of your present system and its ability to export different types of data is a must. Also, think about whether you are interested in replacing your ILS,

having the ability to slowly phase it out with a more robust next-generation front end, or simply finding a user-friendly interface to sit on top of your native ILS. Having a shared vision of what you want the system to accomplish is a vital component in choosing an appropriate product.

***Susan Marcin** is the head of digital services and technology planning for the DiMenna-Nyselius Library at Fair-*

*field University in Fairfield, Conn. She holds an M.S.L.S. degree from Catholic University and an M.B.A. degree from Fairfield University. Her email address is smarcin@mail.fairfield.edu. **Peter Morris** is the systems librarian for the DiMenna-Nyselius Library at Fairfield University in Fairfield, Conn. He holds an M.L.I.S. degree from Simmons College. His email address is pmorris@mail.fairfield.edu.*



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