

The Colorado Union Catalog Project

Expanding the Ohio-LINK and ORBIS concepts

by Anthony J. Dedrick

The Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries (Alliance), in partnership with 16 Colorado and Wyoming libraries, has embarked on an ambitious and innovative union catalog project (Prospector). This project, while providing similar functionality and benefits as Ohio-LINK and ORBIS, will do so in a much more diverse institutional and system environment.

Background

The current project has an interesting and somewhat convoluted background going back to 1974 when the Alliance was formed, primarily to investigate general resource sharing. The Alliance was incorporated in 1978 as a not-for-profit corporation and several years later began development of an integrated library system (ILS) known as the "CARL System."

In 1988, CARL Systems, Inc., a for-profit subsidiary was formed; and by 1993, most of the larger libraries in the state, along with the state community colleges, were running CARL systems. Although these libraries were using a common ILS with good connectivity between sites, a true union catalog was lacking. The two largest academic libraries in the state, the University of Colorado, Boulder, and Colorado State University migrated to the Innovative Interfaces, Inc. (III), system in 1994. Over the next four years, several additional academic libraries and a major public library also made the transition to III.

Thus the Alliance became a multi-platform organization supporting both CARL and III member libraries. The first attempt by the Alliance to develop a union catalog began in 1996 and involved the Denver Public Library, the Auraria Library, and the University of Northern Colorado (UNC) Libraries. Common union catalog policies were developed and the project was to be based on the CARL systems, which all three members were currently using. Not long after that initial attempt, Auraria, UNC, and several other Alliance libraries decided to migrate to III and the project was discontinued. The concept was then resurrected when grant funds from the state became available and the participating libraries who had switched to III completed their transitions to the new systems.

Need and purpose

The value and need for union catalogs, especially those with the capability of patron-initiated borrowing, are fairly obvious. While most of the academic and public libraries in Colorado have III or CARL systems, patrons must still search multiple sites and rely on interlibrary loan to obtain the actual materials. This is particularly difficult in a large state such as Colorado where the majority of library resources are concentrated in a small geographic area bounded by Denver, Boulder, and Ft. Collins. In addition, the rapid expansion of distance education programs by virtually all of the colleges and universities in

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the state has created a strong demand for library materials that often cannot be met satisfactorily at the local level.

Development and management

Currently, Ohio-LINK (Ohio) and Orbis (Oregon) are limited to academic libraries within their respective states and use a common platform—III. Prospector, on the other hand, will be a multi-state, multitype library, and multitype ILS union catalog. Developing a union catalog with patron-initiated borrowing and materials delivery within such a diverse environment will be a unique project. It has some potentially major implications nationwide when one considers the large number of academic libraries using III and the preponderance of large public libraries using CARL. Sixteen libraries are participating in the initial phase of the project (see sidebar).

Both the policy development and technological challenges are significant. In terms of policy, a single set of circulation rules had to be developed for inter-institutional patron lending. These policies had to be acceptable

to both public and academic libraries with policies driven by very different institutional missions. For example, loans ranged from an unlimited number of items for one month to six items for two weeks. Fines ranged from \$0 to \$1 per day among the participating libraries. The principal technological challenges will be developing software that will interface the CARL and III systems and in providing fast, stable network connectivity.

Once funding was secured, contract negotiations with III were initiated to secure the necessary hardware and software. At the same time, two task forces, Document Delivery/Circulation and Cataloging/Reference, were formed during the fall of 1997.

By June 1998, they had developed policies and specifications that have received preliminary approval from the Prospector Steering Committee, comprised of the directors of all the participating libraries.

The Document Delivery/Circulation Task Force was charged with developing common policies for loan periods, fines, blocking, holds, renewals, item check-out limits, and routing precedence. A key element in developing the circulation policies was that local sites would retain their own policies and that the common policies would apply only to materials borrowed through Prospector.

The proposed check-out limit of 40 items proved to be the most difficult issue to resolve. The smaller libraries were concerned with the possibility of their limited collections being depleted. Hopefully this concern will be addressed by load leveling of requests between libraries and the ability of any library to control which items can or cannot be loaned through the system. Some academic sites noted that noninstitutional borrower privileges were being increased almost to the level of campus users. For example, the Auraria Library's noninstitutional patrons had a limit of six items for two weeks. If these same patrons went through the union catalog, they could borrow up to 40 items for three weeks. In this case, as with a number of other policy issues, the experiences of ORBIS and Ohio-LINK were very useful in obtaining consensus.

Frequently, the issues and concerns raised during the policy development phases of the Prospector project were ones that proved to be groundless based on the Ohio-LINK and

Libraries participating in Prospector's initial phase

Public academic

- Auraria Library (III site)—serves University of Colorado at Denver, Metropolitan State College of Denver and Community College of Denver
- Colorado School of Mines (CARL site)
- Colorado State University (III site)
- Fort Lewis College (III site)
- University of Colorado—Boulder, Colorado Springs, Health Science Center, Law Library (all III sites)
- University of Northern Colorado (III site)
- University of Wyoming (CARL site)

Private academic

- Colorado College (III site)
- Regis University (CARL site)
- University of Denver—main campus and Law Library (both III sites)

Public

- Denver Public Library (CARL site)
- Jefferson County Library (III site)

ORBIS experiences. The basic loan policies established were a three-week loan period, 40 item check-out limit, and 40 holds. No recalls are allowed unless an item is needed for an academic reserve room. Patrons will get two renewals for three weeks unless a hold is present on the item. The fine policies of the "home" library will be applied to Prospector transactions and fines collected will be retained by that "home" library. Lost book charges will also be collected by the "home" library, but will be reimbursed to the owning library on an annual basis.

Inn-Reach (III's Union Catalog System) circulation software creates virtual or temporary records (patron and item) to manage the multi-site transactions. No full patron database will be maintained centrally.

The Cataloging/Reference Task Force was charged with determining display and overlay rules, fields to be indexed and displayed, and precedence for which master records will be used in the central catalog when multiple libraries own the same item. The catalog will be a combined database of the participating libraries, built and maintained in real-time, with participating sites contributing records automatically. It will be based on the "one master record" concept in conjunction with a separate holdings display for libraries owning the same item. This display will provide users with circulation status, local call numbers, and shelving locations. Users can access the union catalog directly or pass on a local search to it. The catalog will provide both Web and character-based (telnet) interfaces to support both technologically high end and low end users throughout the state.

Records should have the most complete cataloging available, i.e., those with the highest encoding levels will take precedence. Records to be included are for any materials allowed to circulate, items such as reference or virtual items requiring user authentication which do not circulate but can be used on-site, and items with unrestricted URL's or IP addresses.

A site visit was completed in September by an III INN-Reach specialist to review the union catalog circulation profiling and specifications. For the existing III libraries this will be somewhat similar to the work done to implement their local systems. The more complex tasks will be mapping local tables and

rules to the central catalog structure, particularly for the CARL sites.

The union catalog of the III libraries is expected to be available by early 1999 with document delivery between those sites following a little later in the year. The full union catalog, incorporating the holdings of the CARL libraries, should be available later in 1999. Operation of the system will be by the Alliance where the server is located. Alliance staff will provide network connectivity, develop software to interface the III and CARL systems, and integrate the records from the CARL libraries into the III INN-Reach software. Administrative and grant fiscal management will be performed by the University of Northern Colorado Libraries.

The efficient and timely delivery of materials is also a critical element within a patron-initiated borrowing union catalog. At present, five widely dispersed library courier systems exist within the state to provide delivery of interlibrary loan items and other miscellaneous materials. Initially, the current infrastructure will be used and monitored as to performance under what is anticipated to be a major increase in activity level.

Conclusion

For Colorado, the Prospector project appears to be the beginning of a vision long held within the state: a system that will provide seamless access to many collections coupled with efficient patron-initiated borrowing and delivery service to convenient locations. Despite the phenomenal growth in electronic resources, particularly full text data bases, provision of actual books and journal articles (or copies) remains a fundamental activity of virtually all libraries. Prospector should significantly enhance and simplify that core activity in a cost-effective, user-friendly manner. The experience gained in this endeavor, which includes public and academic libraries and two of the most common ILS systems in the United States, will also be beneficial to the profession as a whole. It should be of particular interest to those libraries needing multiplatform and multitype library solutions to union catalog development.

Notes

More information on the current status of the project is available at <http://www.coalliance.org/prospector>. ■

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