
Data Cleanup

Before and After a Migration

by *Brighid Gonzales*

When the library at Our Lady of the Lake University, a small private Catholic school in San Antonio, Texas, started thinking about migrating to a new integrated library system (ILS), the prospect seemed daunting. The library had been on SirsiDynix Symphony since automating from the original card catalog over 20 years ago, and the limitations of the past-generation system had started to become very clear to a staff that had previously been without a true systems librarian for at least half of that time. Library staff were looking forward to several benefits of a new system: a browser-based system that could be used anywhere, including for remote work or for checking out books at special events outside the library; a more streamlined cataloging workflow for a library with only one cataloger and one cataloging assistant; and better, more integrated handling of non-print materials, such as e-books, journals, and databases. Also anticipated was better integration with other systems such as interlibrary loan (we changed over from ILLiad to Tipasa in line with the system migration) and Ellucian Colleague, the university's enterprise resource planning (ERP) software.

Everyone seemed more than ready for an upgrade and looked forward to having a web-based system with more modern architecture and an easier way to meet current circulation and cataloging needs. While motivating staff and getting everyone on board with a major systems migration is usually lamented as one of the main difficulties of a systems migration, we did not have that problem. Instead, our enthusiasm for change may have resulted in jumping right into the migration process without as much preparation as we could have done. We went through a short request for proposal (RFP) and selection process and settled on OCLC's WorldShare Management Services (WMS) for our new library system.

When fully staffed, the library consisted of six librarians (including the director) and five staff. With such a small library there were always projects that needed to be done, and everyone had to wear many hats, with both technical and public services staff taking part in things like collection maintenance. A perennial shortage of full staffing and in-house systems knowledge had been behind the lack of any serious weeding in decades, along with the proliferation of lost and missing items still hanging out in the catalog. These were issues that we ideally should have handled before starting a major migration, but since we didn't do that, we instead had to address them post-migration.

Working alongside a cohort of other libraries migrating to WMS, we followed a schedule set by our implementation manager to accomplish certain milestones in the migration, with a plan to go live with the new system once spring classes had ended. At the beginning of the process, OCLC suggested that migrating libraries generate a list of missing items and check the shelves, updating the status of any items located in the process. OCLC advised us not to migrate missing items into the new system, and we followed this advice. Checking the shelves for missing items was one of the only clean-up steps we took before diving into the work of the actual migration.

After 20 years on SirsiDynix, the library had been doing some things so long that sometimes no one really knew for sure why they were done that way. Items that were reported as lost were given lost status and missing items were marked as missing. These items were left in the catalog with those designations, patron records and fines still attached, so that they could never be removed.

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Overdue items remained overdue forever, even those that had not been seen for decades, checked out by students who had long since graduated and were unlikely ever to return them or come back to pay their fine. Lost items also remained in the system indefinitely.

While we had done a preliminary check of the shelves for any missing items, a true inventory of the collection had not been done in years, probably decades. Also missing from much-needed projects over the years was any full-scale weeding of the collection. Because these activities were so overdue, they had gone from small maintenance projects to projects of an overwhelming scope that could not be completed in a single summer, or in some cases, in a single year. With a go-live date already on the calendar for June, there simply wasn't enough time to do these important cleanup projects before the migration was in progress. As a result, we had to migrate everything and do the cleanup afterward in the new system.

While we were in the process of mapping and migrating all of our records from Sirsi into WMS, we also had to decide how to handle new acquisitions during this transition period. Our options were to refrain from cataloging any new items until the new system was ready to be used, or to catalog new items in both the old and the new systems until the new system went live. We decided to move forward with dual cataloging in both systems so that newly acquired items would be available to students and faculty as soon as possible and to avoid a cataloging backlog that would need to be processed once the new system was in place.

Luckily, the migration itself went very smoothly overall, and we transitioned from SirsiDynix to WMS that summer without any major issues. However, while the staff was in the process of learning the new system and devising new workflows for completing their job duties in WMS, we also had to begin undertaking some of these cleanup projects. A small library with limited staffing meant that everyone on staff essentially had to take part in these extra projects, and it suddenly seemed like a lot to do.

The first post-migration project we initiated was an inventory and shelf-reading project. We went through the entirety of the library stacks and inventoried what was on the shelves, what was missing from the shelves, and what was misshelved so egregiously it might otherwise have never been found. We also took this opportunity to resolve call number issues and print new spine labels where needed. The result was that for the first time we had a true understanding of what was really in the library's collections. A number of items that previously had a missing status and were subsequently not migrated to the new system were found during this process and had to be re-cataloged back into the new system. We also found a number of items that were not on the shelf despite being marked as available in the catalog. We fixed these issues as part of the post-migration data cleanup process. In retrospect, it would have benefited us to complete this work before the migration.

Another project that had to be done after the migration was a complete weeding of the collection. This project wasn't really connected to the migration but impacted it, as we ended up weeding over 10,000 items from the system that really didn't need to be migrated in the first place. Unfortunately, with a project this large, there simply wasn't time for it to be done before the migration. Ideally, we should have been regularly weeding the collection as new items were purchased so that such a major project wasn't necessary, but since we weren't doing that, it would have been a good idea to anticipate the ILS migration with enough advanced time to complete a weeding project of that size. Even now, months after I've moved on to another library, this weeding project continues.

One important cleanup project that was completed before the migration was a reclamation project done through OCLC. During the reclamation process, OCLC matched the library's holdings to WorldCat records to ensure that all holdings were up-to-date, which especially helped avoid er-

roneous ILL requests and confusing holdings information in WorldCat. Having this information up-to-date before migrating everything to a new system made the entire process easier to manage.

In addition to bibliographic, item, and holdings records, other data that needed to be migrated to the new system included acquisitions records (e.g., order records/invoices, vendor records, purchase orders, standing orders), circulation records (e.g., patron records, current checkouts and overdues, holds, circulation statistics, fines), and loan rules and policies. Although we migrated everything to the new system and did not make any immediate changes, this would have been an ideal time to clean up these records and consider any changes that we wanted to make to our circulation processes during the migration. Other things to look at that might have helped to streamline the process included invalid MARC records, records without items attached, items without barcodes attached, location codes no longer in use, item types no longer in use, patron types no longer in use, outdated reserve items, expired patron records, order records for canceled orders, and inactive standing order records.

On our go-live date we had backup systems in place in case of any major issues. Our exported circulation data was saved in Excel format for quick consultation if needed, and we decided on a simple pen and paper system for recording transactions if the system unexpectedly failed, followed by rolling back to the old system (still online for our first month on WMS) while any necessary troubleshooting took place. In the end we had a smooth transition to WMS, and we ended up with a next-generation system that better met our needs as well as those of our patrons. Even if we did some things a little bit backwards, leaving enough time in the planning phase to complete any necessary cleanup of the catalog and library data is a lesson learned for any future migrations.