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# Alma and Primo VE Library Management System Migration in a Consortia Environment

by Becca Peters

The Metro State University was established in 1971 in St. Paul, Minnesota as an urban university focused on serving the educational needs of adult learners. The Metro State University Library and Learning Center was constructed in 2004 and houses both the university library and a branch of the St. Paul Public Library System, Dayton's Bluff Public Library. The university is part of the Minnesota State higher education system. Metro State University Library belongs to a statewide library consortium, MnPALS, which consists of approximately 53 libraries in Minnesota, including 7 state universities, 26 community and technical colleges, 6 state government libraries, 11 private colleges and universities, and 3 special libraries.

The MnPALS consortium libraries largely operate autonomously from one another other than using the same Integrated Library System (ILS). The consortium had originally migrated to Aleph in 2005 and ten years later the group felt it was past time to look for a system that supported both back end library functions and discovery. Most of the libraries used Ex Libris's Aleph as the ILS to provide the library back end functions and then used a library catalog system designed and supported by PALS (Program for Automated Library Systems). PALS is the 13-member library technology systems, support, and training team for MnPALS. Metro State Library also used a separate discovery service, ProQuest's Summon, to provide a better online search experience for its users for access to electronic resources.

The MnPALS consortium made the decision in 2015 to explore alternatives for a new ILS. A small volunteer group of member libraries staff and PALS employees was formed and conducted a request for proposal (RFP) process in 2016 for the selection of a new ILS. The group narrowed down the choices to Ex Libris's Alma/Primo and OCLC's Worldshare Management Services (WMS) and ultimately went with Ex Libris's Alma and Primo. The main deciding factors for going with Ex Libris were their plan for consortium-wide resource sharing and a better discovery layer. There were surprises later regarding additional costs to migrate acquisition and electronic resources data that were not factored into the RFP process nor the price of the contract. Our library decided that we could not lose all of our historical acquisitions data and would have to develop a workaround for the electronic resources information.

Ex Libris initially worked with a subset of consortium libraries, called the vanguard libraries, to conduct a preliminary migration to test for potential issues and provide a first look at how our migrated data appeared in Alma and Primo. This group worked with Ex Libris to overcome any problems; after two trial imports, they decided we could begin implementation. The consortium kicked off our implementation process with Ex Libris in early January 2018 with plans for a January 2019 migration. At the time, our consortium was the largest migration that Ex Libris had undertaken for Alma and Primo. Ex Libris also introduced Primo VE during this time and the group made the decision to migrate to Primo VE.

Our migration was to include an institution zone (IZ), network zone (NZ) and community zone (CZ). The institution zone contains only local print and electronics holdings, whereas the network zone contains print and electronic holdings of all libraries and the community zone contains elec-

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tronic records managed by Ex Libris. Libraries were offered the option to either have an IZ and CZ only, or an IZ, NZ and CZ migration. Some libraries wanted to keep their MARC bibliographic records due to local enhancements and decided to go with the IZ and CZ route. The decision to go with shared records via the NZ involved many decisions related to issues such as migration order, which could affect the number of records that an individual library retained in Alma, and the formation of network rules and policies to govern cataloging decisions.

Each library had to identify an implementation lead for their library and this person worked with PALS directly to submit forms and relay local decisions to Ex Libris. At Metro State Library, our local implementation team consisted of a cataloging/acquisitions librarian, electronic resources librarian, public services manager, and a circulation library technician. The group met weekly starting in fall 2018 and worked on forms such as the Alma Configuration form, Alma Migration form and Primo VE Configuration form that would guide the work that Ex Libris conducted on our behalf for the migration. In some ways these forms were daunting, as we were providing the framework for how our Alma and Primo VE instance would be set up and how our data would be migrated without a true understanding of the final result.

One thing that was helpful in decision-making is that our consortium paid for a training sandbox where theories could be tested. All implementation team members were required to become Alma and Primo VE certified. The training for this certification comprised numerous video components followed up by two tests administered by Ex Libris. The group also had to set up Alma XML letters, which are the main form of communication sent to users via email. These letters are mainly sent for things relating to interlibrary loan (ILL), fulfillment and citations, such as ILL item availability, checked out and returned items, and Primo VE resource citations. The Primo VE resource citations letter is emailed when a user selects a resource/record to be emailed to them. The letter contains the resource's citation information, such as author and title, along with a link to access the resource. The user also has the ability to include the actual citation they generated using either MLA, APA, Harvard or Chicago/Turabian citation style.

An important part of the year-long implementation process was the review and cleanup of all participating libraries' data. When reviewing the cleanup of data, a decision needed to be made whether cleanup would be done pre- or post- migration, as some things would be easier to clean up in the new system. Alma has the built-in capability of producing reports through Analytics, whereas Aleph reports were produced outside of the software and were limited in scope. The three main areas of cleanup related to the areas of circulation, acquisitions and cataloging. For circulation, each library cleaned up their users since Ex Libris factors in the number of users in their pricing structure. For cataloging, PALS identified and provided each library with a list of records for potential issues with the MARC fields 019 and 035 relating to OCLC numbers, which could negatively affect the merging of duplicate records.

Even with all of this pre-cleanup, PALS provided a post-migration list of records to each library that identified records that did not merge correctly and were placed in our IZ only. Each library was responsible for cleaning up their list of non-merged records. Any records with statuses like cataloging or missing were set to a new status of technical migration in Alma for later cleanup. At Metro Library, the implementation team decided to migrate all of our e-book titles and streaming films records to our IZ only, as well as allowing Ex Libris to migrate them as electronic resources as a backup in case something didn't go as planned. This ultimately was a wise decision, as some of our individually purchased e-books did not migrate over. Having that backup record made activation of these e-book titles much easier, and they were easily removed when no longer needed.

One important feature to be aware of with Alma and Primo VE is that both programs have monthly software updates, so it can prove challenging to stay current with new enhancements. Alongside the monthly updates there can also be major enhancements to the different modules within Alma. For example, the classic metadata editor (MDE), used for cataloging, underwent major changes since our migration in 2019 and is set to sunset in May 2023. The new MDE went live in 2021 with the option to toggle between the classic and new MDE.

The migration to Alma and Primo VE was a big commitment of time and resources both at the consortium and local level. This was a yearlong process that required many decisions concerning how Alma and Primo VE would function, as well as deciding what workflows, processes, and policies would be need to be changed or eliminated. We always had to keep in mind that this was an opportunity to explore new ways of accomplishing our work while also keeping the end user in mind. The one area where the various member libraries made significant changes was to fulfillment (circulation) policies that provided consistency to users across the consortium. The consortium agreed to adopt a standard lost replacement fee and the same loan periods based on the type of user, such as student, faculty/staff and community borrowers. This standardization of fulfillment policies had been widely discussed over the years but needed the impetus of the migration to be realized. One important aspect of the migration that saved us time and solidified decision making was utilizing the knowledge from other consortiums that had migrated before us, such as Orbis Cascade Alliance and the University of Wisconsin System. Both consortiums provided support and information both formally and informally, which included workflows, policies and processes.