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The Parallel Universe of Electronic Resource Discovery, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Community Zone

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The Parallel Universe of Electronic Resource Discovery

or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Community Zone

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At the VCU Libraries, we’ve been an Ex Libris shop since 2003 when we implemented Aleph.

- **Aleph**: all the cataloging records (metadata) for everything in our collection.
- **Aleph discovery = Aleph OPAC**: the main way that library users could locate items in our collection. Drew entirely on the metadata that was in Aleph.
- **OCLC**: source for most of the Aleph metadata. VCU holdings also reflected in OCLC WorldCat. Most OCLC interactions were on a record by record basis.
- **OCLC discovery = WorldCat.org and FirstSearch** (including access to some OCLC databases like ArticleFirst and ERIC that allowed users to locate articles).
- Increase in purchase of electronic collections led to use of vendor record files for uploading into Aleph and updating holdings in OCLC.
- **SFX**: managed access to our growing collection of electronic journals with central maintenance of metadata, coverage and linking information.
- **SFX discovery = external databases** (e.g., Google Scholar, PubMed, FirstSearch) with direct access to individual articles. There was no direct connection between SFX and the Aleph OPAC.
- **No interaction between SFX and Aleph OPAC** → maintain e-journal records in SFX, Aleph and OCLC.
This sort of manual record maintenance became increasingly difficult to manage as our electronic collections expanded.
When we began using Aleph in 2003, electronic resources represented a relatively small proportion of our entire collection.
10 years later – our situation was dramatically different.

The increasing complexity of managing electronic resource metadata was one the reasons why we signed on to be an Alma early adopter in 2011.
In that year we started moving to Primo as a replacement for the Aleph OPAC (which we knew would be going away when we implemented Alma.

Primo pulled in metadata from our Aleph title-level records, but it included much more than that, including...
...metadata from digital collections in CONTENTdm

and article level metadata contained in the Primo Central Index

Complex interactions between the PCI and SFX determined which articles indexed in the PCI were available to VCU users -- Primo would display those articles in the search results and link users directly to the articles.
With Alma, we essentially merged the metadata and functions of SFX with the metadata and functions of Aleph.

No longer need to maintain records for electronic journals in two places. Instead of SFX, we now rely on the Alma Community Zone to maintain our electronic journal records and access centrally, and we are trying to make much more effective use on the CZ for other electronic resources, too. This is particularly efficient when we are working with collections that are comprehensive, such as ebrary Academic Complete.
When we were using Aleph, we retrieved monthly files of new records from the ebrary admin site. We loaded these into Aleph and extracted OCLC record numbers to update our holdings in OCLC.

And we retrieved monthly lists of deleted records, located them in Aleph and either deleted the records or removed the 856 fields, and we canceled our holdings symbol on OCLC records – IF we didn’t have holdings for the same title in some other collection (a particularly vexing problem to manage after the adoption of vendor neutral records...)

![Image of ebrary and Aleph interfaces]
In Alma, using the CZ, we don't have to go the vendor's site anymore and manually retrieve records to load into Alma, and we don't have to retrieve monthly lists of deleted records and remove them from Alma manually.

Instead, we configure the Alma CZ ebrary Academic Complete collection as an auto-active collection -- Ex Libris interacts with ebrary and adds new titles and removes deleted titles to the Alma CZ collection automatically.

For a lot of our electronic resources, we can simply activate the Alma CZ collections and have a high degree of confidence that the current titles in those collections will be discoverable in Primo. And the timeliness will probably be at least as good as we achieved when we were retrieving monthly records from the ebrary vendor site.
If we're worried that some of the Alma CZ MARC records are extremely brief we have a sort of safety net in the Primo Central Index. For many of our electronic resources (like Ebrary) the PCI provides much deeper indexing than is typically available in MARC record fields.

(And we hope that someday there will be an option to dedup the Primo results that come from Alma with the results that come from the PCI ...)

So, the Alma CZ reduces our dependence on external vendor records, and frees us from a lot of record loading and maintenance for e-books and e-journals alike. But what about the OCLC end of things?

The Alma CZ gives us some level of confidence in access to our electronic resources for people who are searching Primo and external databases, but if we’re using the "set it and forget it" method in Alma, how do we uphold our obligation to represent our holdings in OCLC and make our resources discoverable in places like WorldCat.org?

Initially, we were very interested in implementing the Alma publish to OCLC functionality to manage our OCLC holdings for electronic resources – and maybe that’s the direction we should go -- but
1. Setting it up seemed complicated and confusing,
2. It wasn’t clear to us how this process would work for the many, many Community Zone records that had no OCLC record numbers, and
3. We didn’t want our OCLC holdings set on records for print journals (which seemed to make up a lot of the CONSER records for ejournals in the CZ)

Enter the WorldShare Metadata Collection Manager (commonly referred to as the WorldCat Knowledge Base), which functions like the OCLC parallel to the Alma CZ. It includes established collections of electronic resources which we can “select” (i.e., activate) (e.g., Elsevier SD Freedom Collection and ebrary Academic Complete).

We first learned about the WCKB a few years ago when our ILL staff began a sustained campaign to convince us to use it because it offered them the opportunity to provide quicker turnaround time, and increased direct/unmediated ILL transactions.

Initially not convinced that the convenience of ILL warranted what seemed like a lot of extra work for cataloging. Plus, we were busy with some internal reorganizations at the time. So, we procrastinated.
But last summer we began to work on the WCKB configuration for some of our biggest collections, and a very dim little light bulb went on when I noted the option to set our holdings symbol automatically on OCLC records for records added or removed from each collection.

Since then, we have been gradually activating or selecting collections in the OCLC WCKB, and there's some hope that we will be able to set up even more automatic synchronization of electronic holdings between Alma and the WCKB in the future.

Meanwhile, any work that we will be doing in the WCKB will be extremely valuable...
... when FirstSearch goes away at the end of 2015 and is replaced by WorldCat Discovery Services (which is sort of the OCLC parallel to Primo)

We have an "in progress" version of the WorldCat Discovery Services interface available to us right now.

It takes some of its information from WorldCat: records with our holdings symbol display as held by Virginia Commonwealth University. In most, but not all cases, this is linkable -- and takes you to our Primo record.

And it takes some of its information from the WCKB. Electronic titles that are in collections that we have "selected" in the WCKB display with an "Access Online" link. You don't have to go through Primo to get to the e-resource -- you can just click on the link directly. Same for article-level results that are from titles that are in collections that we have selected.

Let’s look at a few examples.
3D printing for dummies:

In WCDS there is a hyperlinked “held by Virginia Commonwealth University” because our holdings symbol is set in OCLC for this title – (and our holdings symbol was set automatically because it’s in the ebrary Academic Complete collection, which we selected in its entirety in the WCKB and configured to automatically manage our holdings in OCLC).

Clicking on “Virginia Commonwealth University” tries to do an ISBN search in Primo. This particular search fails because Primo can’t find a record with the matching ISBN number. [In fact, there is an Alma record with this ISBN number, but the problem is that our Primo production configuration is set up to index isbns in 020 $a and this particular ISBN is an Alma Community Zone record in 020 $e. We’ve adjusted our Primo rules in our test environment but it’s not yet replicated in production.]

but it doesn’t really matter that the link to Primo fails. Why would you pick this link when there is also an “Access online” link which takes you directly to the e-book (?) And this Access Online link is there because this title is part of a collection that has been activated in the WCKB.
Much like the behavior we see when we retrieve this title in Primo.
Another example: search for James Branch Cabell and then limit to articles → “What can be saved from the wreckage?”

Says “Held by Virginia Commonwealth University” because our holdings symbol is on the WorldCat record for the journal title.

Has “Access online” because this article is in a journal that is part of a collection that has been selected/activated by us (WCKB and WorldCat Configuration)

Clicking on Virginia Commonwealth University does an ISSN search in Primo which retrieves what Primo thinks is the matching journal record (but not the article)

Clicking on the “Access online” link takes you directly to the source with the article PDF.
Primo discovery: What Can Be Saved from the Wreckage (article search)

Again... similar behavior to retrieval via Primo.
And here’s another parallel between OCLC discovery and Primo: The article-level result I just demonstrated in WorldShare Discovery Service was there because we had also activated the Gale Literature Resource Center in our OCLC service configuration menu. Just as we had activated that same resource in our Primo Central Index configuration.
Implementing WCDS as a replacement to FirstSearch gives us extra motivation to make the WCKB reflect our electronic holdings as completely as possible (beyond the original motivation to aid our ILL friends). As I’ve already suggested, both the Alma CZ and the OCLC WCKB work best for us in those cases where our collection holdings are comprehensive.
For these collections we use the “set it and forget it” approach to the Alma CZ and the WCKB, but we also apply a “trust but verify” policy

We use the Alma Community Zone Updates Task List to get reports of CZ portfolios added / deleted → spot check to see if these changes are also reflected in WorldCat holdings

And we do Alma repository searches of electronic titles, not suppressed, with portfolios that are available and created during the past week (also spot-checking against WorldCat)
We also receive regular activity reports from the Worldshare Metadata Collection Manager (WCKB) showing the provider, collection, title, OCLC number and holdings update action (set or delete) in WorldCat. We spot check to see if these changes are reflected in Alma
And we get reports from vendors which we spot-check against both Alma and WorldCat. Here is an example from one of our vendors showing titles released in March 2014.
... and report problems when found

We frequently take advantage of opportunities to report problems

- Send to Ex Libris link at collection or portfolio level
- OCLC support link in WCKB interface.
We are still working on improving our workflows for those electronic collections in which our holdings are not comprehensive. And I would love to hear more from all of you about how you are handling these situations.

But, we believe that the parallel use of the Alma CZ and WCKB for managing our comprehensive collections is the best way we have found for providing user access to the majority of our electronic resources.

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**VCU’s new approach managing e-resources**

1. Activate collections in the Alma Community Zone and let Ex Libris manage the individual titles in those collections (with discovery via Primo)

2. Select collections in the WorldCat Knowledge Base and let OCLC take care of managing our holdings symbol for titles in those collections (with discovery via WorldCat Discovery Services)

3. Accept that correlation between records in OCLC and records in Alma is less critical for e-resources if discovery interfaces support direct linking to the e-resources.

4. Learn to export Alma e-resource data and use it to maintain e-resource holdings in the WorldCat Knowledge Base (... and others...)

5. Meanwhile ... focus staff time on stand-alone titles and selective collections.
Here is a recent snapshot of electronic collections we have activated in the Community Zone (roughly 450 in all, with the majority in the “non-auto-active” category)
And here is another way of looking at our Community Zone collection and portfolio landscape.

On the left – another view of the activated electronic collections (auto-active and non-auto-active)

On the right - the distribution of portfolios within those collections.

So, not quite 45% of our collections are auto-active, but roughly 95% of our electronic portfolios are in these auto-active collections.
This chart pertains to e-books only.

Cataloging staff have been keeping track of the number of e-books they activate manually in the CZ, and this year I started comparing that with Alma analytic reports of the total number of ebook portfolios activated each month.

As you can see, our staff are generally activating a few hundred e-book portfolios manually each month. But, meanwhile, the auto-activation function in Alma is activating thousands. (YTD = 6409 activated manually; 99,167 activated in total).

Monthly WorldShare Metadata Collection Manager reports from this same time period are a little skewed, because they are more likely to reflect first-time activation of large collections, but they, too, show that our holdings symbol is being managed automatically for thousands of records each month.

Is this a perfect system? Of course not!

But for the purposes of discovery, I am confident that problems we encounter are dwarfed by the benefits to our users in terms of access and timeliness – whether they are searching in Primo or in the WorldCat Discovery Services.
And that’s how I learned to stop worrying
and ❤️ the Community Zone.
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