

Chapter 32

The Single–Search Project: Selecting and Implementing Primo at a Research and Cultural Heritage Institution

Jennifer Palmisano
Center for Jewish History, USA

ABSTRACT

The mission of this chapter is to demonstrate one research/cultural institution's discovery solution journey. This includes information about the Center for Jewish History, its history and development as an organization, how these factors affect implementation at the Center, and the Center's selection and implementation of Primo. This chapter delves into the challenges faced by smaller cultural and research institutions with special collections that wish to stay ahead of the curve in what some consider a "library-centric" environment and the challenges inherent in the search and implementation process. It discusses how digital, archival, and museum data, in conjunction with library data, shaped the development and needs of this project from its inception. Other topics described include phased implementation, authentication, customization of data sources, and evaluating impact of a discovery tool. Most importantly, this chapter shows how usability concerns have been resolved for the Center's researchers and staff alike.

INTRODUCTION

The Center for Jewish History and its Data Landscape before Discovery

The Center for Jewish History is a research and cultural heritage institution dedicated to the pres-

ervation of and access to Jewish history. It was created by the union of five partner institutions, with that union necessitating the creation of new systems to facilitate greater access to the partner collections. However, over the years the global online environment has become fragmented, a situation that is magnified the more complex data becomes. Affected by this fragmentation, the Center chose to combat its sprawling online

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presence through implementation of a discovery solution that serves as both an index to all its content (library, archival, digital, electronic, and museum) and a unified user interface to ease the researcher's online experience at the Center.

The Center supports three OPACs (Online Public Access Catalogs) – Library/Archives (ExLibris™¹ Aleph®² ILS), Digital (ExLibris™ DigiTool®³), and Museum (KE's Electronic Museum system). The purpose of the Single-Search project was to incorporate all of these resources into the Single-Search interface or portal. For the majority of their research, patrons used the Aleph catalog from ExLibris™. In Aleph®, data is in MARC format, with capability to convert to MARC XML. The Center's data can be found in a number of different languages, including German, Hebrew, Yiddish, and Russian. DigiTool®, the ExLibris™ digital asset management system, is used to search and manage digital content. Items in DigiTool® generally have an equivalent record in Aleph®, so there is some duplication between the two systems. Like most digital asset management systems, DigiTool® is Dublin Core and MARC XML compliant, but the Center generally uses MARC XML. DigiTool® also houses the Center's collection of over 7,000 finding aids. For museum materials, one partner organization chose to use the Aleph database, but most of the museum and cultural artifact records are held in KE's Electronic Museum System (Emu). This system does not use MARC. However, its data can be converted to Dublin Core. Many of the more granular fields are missing after this conversion to Dublin Core, but it provides a good option for sharing metadata. In addition to these OPACs, the Center also uses Metalib®⁴ and SFX®⁵ for e-resource management and access, and numerous project Websites. While it was not a high priority to include these last systems in the final product, their inclusion and thus higher visibility was desired.

In summary, the average researcher faces a very tumultuous online environment at the Center. Failing to use any specific search tool could lead

to fragmented research and a less than comprehensive picture of the Center's collections. Yet the likelihood that the average researcher looks in all these search environments is minimal, even with staff intervention.

Does Special Library Equal Special Needs?

While limited literature is available on creating discovery interfaces for library, archive, and museum institutions, there is a wealth of knowledge about collaborative projects that mirror the mission of the Single-Search project. Most of these projects refer to multiple institutions with separate databases and different organizational culture.

Many of these projects mirror the objectives of the Single-Search Project, but most of them vary greatly in levels of scope, audience, and funding. The breadth of the Center project was consistent with that of the Smithsonian and Europeana, but there is considerable disparity in the number of resources and funding available (Edson, 2010; Angelaki, 2010).

Through a project review, one finds that there are similarities between the challenges that are faced in these cultural heritage projects. Data differences are one of the most challenging aspects of these projects and work at the Center in general. "Good quality metadata aids discoverability of content. And good quality metadata is not just about structure, but also about shared approaches to data values in dates, subject terms, and so on" (Gow, 2010, p.12). In the Center's data, a user could interact with a number of non-Roman language scripts, international cataloging practices, archival, museum, or other types of format, and any number of other oddities.

Other institutions have struggled with the same metadata challenges in similar projects, particularly with facets. The "big three" as Nate Solas (2010) refers to them – "Creator, Medium, and Culture" – are very similar to challenges that libraries and archives face with author, form/

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