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Assessing Reserve Management Systems: Do They Deliver on Their Promises?

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The authors examine, based on a survey of users, the e-reserve management software landscape. Library course reserve processing staff was surveyed to determine what management systems, if any, are being used and how effective they are in meeting the needs of the library, the faculty, and the students. Although there are many positive aspects to such systems, there are some shortcomings, which the authors discuss.

KEYWORDS *e-reserves, electronic reserves, copyright, course management systems*

INTRODUCTION

The topic of course reserves and what system to use—commercial, home-grown, course management system, or some combination thereof—continues to be debated on various access services listservs and by private correspondence. Prior to electronic reserves, libraries placed physical items such as books, videos, and print copies of articles on reserve. This type of “hard copy” reserve meant that students would need to physically go to the library to obtain required or supplemental readings for class. Additionally, faculty would also need to physically go to the library to drop off materials to be placed on hard copy reserve. But over the past several years, electronic course reserves have become an integral part of library services to faculty and students. To this end, librarians are asked to identify, evaluate, and recommend a reserves management system that is both highly functional

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and easy to use. Currently, several vendors, (commercial reserves systems, library management systems, and course management systems) offer an electronic reserves option. This option, depending on the system, ranges from integrating reserves materials into the library catalog, scanning and posting articles electronically, and deep linking (OpenURL) within library subscribed databases to a combination of reserves systems linked to the library catalog or a university course management system.

This article does not delve into the reasons for the shift from print to electronic reserves generally; it will address the current status of the features and functionality of reserves systems used by libraries. The authors deliberately elected not to speak with the companies that provide these services in order to avoid bias.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In the past decade, there have been dozens of articles on specific reserves systems implemented, policies created, and user satisfaction gauged at individual institutions. In 1999 an Association of Research Libraries (ARL) SPEC Kit (Systems and Procedures Exchange Center) was issued, designed to assist libraries in developing their own services, with questions regarding services offered, staffing, technology issues, user evaluation, and copyright. Results of the ARL SPEC Kit survey revealed that most libraries were using a “home-grown” reserves system. Today it appears that the trend has shifted toward commercially available systems, with dozens of articles written by individuals at various institutions describing what system is used, implementation, policies and procedures, and user satisfaction. Urbanek (2005) provides an overview of Docutek’s ERes system at his library, highlights the goals of the implementation, and provides an excellent summary of operations during the first year. McMullen (2007) writes a case study of the implementation of a homegrown system designed to meet the needs of the library’s reserves system. The article highlights the technical aspects of developing a home-grown system but does not adequately address user satisfaction. Cheung and Patrick (2007) share their experience with using Blackboard (a course management system) for reserves integrating such user conveniences as SFX linking, OpenURL mapping, and streaming video. Austin and Taylor (2007) administered a survey of their users to gauge their satisfaction with print and electronic materials on reserve. Other articles focus on service to distant patrons, collaborations between medical and main campus libraries, and on-line instruction. To date, no large-scale assessment of reserve management systems has been identified.

METHODOLOGY

In spring 2008, the authors created a survey using SurveyMonkey that was distributed to Lib-Ereserves, STARS-L, and ILLiad-ILL listserv subscribers.

These lists are designed to discuss reserves and reserves management, interlibrary loan, and access services. At the time of the survey, there were over 700 subscribers to these various lists, from a wide range of institutions both national and international. Subscribers were asked to identify their institutions solely for the purposes of determining if duplicate responses from the same institution were submitted as there is often more than one person from an institution who subscribes to the list; otherwise, responses were confidential. The authors caution, however, that this is a self-selected list of reserve practitioners and interested parties and is not representative of all libraries that provide reserve services to their constituents, but it was the most effective way to reach the largest number of reserve services practitioners. The authors administered the same survey in summer 2009 to see if the e-reserve landscape had changed significantly, using the same methodology. There were 130 respondents in 2009, representing roughly the same types of institutions, in terms of size, location, and services offered, that had replied a year earlier. A copy of the survey questions is attached as the Appendix.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There were a total of 130 respondents who participated in the 2009 survey. Seventy-five respondents specified the size of their institution. See Table 1.

Of the total, 92% of respondents offer an e-reserve service, 83% of whom use a reserve management system for this purpose. When asked to identify which reserves management system is used, the majority (52%) of respondents use a commercial reserves management system. A similar number of respondents (14%) use a homegrown system or the campus course management system (such as Blackboard or Angel) to manage e-reserves. A larger percentage of respondents (16%) use their integrated library system's reserves management system (Aleph, Voyager, and Innovative were mentioned most often) or their ILS management system in combination with an external product to manage reserves processing. See Table 2.

Fewer than half of the libraries using Docutek's ERes use the vendor-hosted option, while the majority of respondents using Atlas's Ares take advantage of Atlas's hosting service (Atlas Systems, 2008). When selecting a reserves management system, respondents seek many features in common. These features include workflow management, copyright management,

TABLE 1 Institution Size: Total Student Population

	< 5,000 population	5,000–10,000 population	10,000±15,000 population	15,000±25,000 population	> 25,000 population
Respondents	23	13	13	15	11

TABLE 2 Reserves Systems in Use by Responding Institutions

Reserve systems in use	2009: Percent of respondents using a commercial reserves management system
Docutek ERes (45)	39%
Atlas Systems' Ares (15)	13%
Locally developed system (16)	14%
Course management system (16)	14%
ReservesDirect (5)	1%
Other System: (1)	16%
ILS only (11)	
ILS + CMS (4)	
RMS + CMS (2)	

integration with course management systems, integration with library management systems, integrated authentication systems, storage space for electronic documents, and ease of use for library staff, faculty, and students. Each of these features received ratings of somewhat or very important. Some respondents noted that some customization was necessary in order for their selected system to meet their needs completely. This was primarily in the area of copyright management (which was accomplished through the course management system in some cases or outside of the reserve management system altogether) and integration with the library management system (which required extensive customization in some instances). See Table 3.

Feedback in the "additional comments" area show that most respondents are either not aware of the full features of their reserves system or they chose not to implement the features because of workflow complications or staffing or technology issues. Comments from various respondents include the following:

Reserves via course management system:

TABLE 3 Responses Regarding Which Features are Currently Available in the Systems Respondents Use

Reserves Management System features	Percent of respondents indicating the feature is <i>available</i>	Percent of respondents indicating the feature is <i>not available</i>
Workflow management	72%	28%
Copyright management	54%	46%
Integration with course management system (Blackboard, etc.)	66%	34%
Integration with ILS/LMS	46%	54%
Single authentication (with campus system)	79%	21%
Ease of use for library staff	90%	10%
Ease of use for faculty	78%	22%
Ease of use for students	93%	7%
Storage space for e-documents	91%	9%

- “We delete the item on Blackboard at the end of each semester. We have the items stored on a separate external hard drive on a PC in the library that is password protected. We keep track of all usage through an Access database with the class, teacher, file name whether it is a link or a pdf, name of article and publication information and data used, and copyright information. We use workflows in our library system and there is not a link to Blackboard. We enter in the information with a note to log onto their course in Blackboard.”

Reserves via reserves commercial vendor (either Ares or ERes):

- “It has a workflow management system but whether one would consider it easy to follow is another question.”
- “Workflow in the program is smooth; the difficult part is determining the material source and constructing the link to be used in our system.”
- “Integration with library management system is not available from the vendor but has been scripted locally.”
- “Highly customizable, particularly the front end.”
- “Access and interfaces are easy to use for the public services desk staff members who have to help people who ask for help with vague queries. . . the screens are intuitive so staff can easily provide good service. . .”
- “We do not use the copyright management system. It just hasn’t worked for our staffing, workflow, and workload.”
- “Copyright management is limited by the information we enter into each item record and the status we assign it at the time; initial acceptance of material involves a basic check for adherence to copyright rules.”
- “We cannot use the integration with the course management system because our university IT folks are concerned with security.”

In addition to features the respondents currently use within their course reserves software, it is equally important to identify what features librarians and reserve staff want in an “ideal” reserves system. Although the reserves management systems that commercial vendors offer provide a variety of features and customization, the respondents all had an idea of what their “ideal” system would allow them to do. These features are detailed in Table 4.

Table 4 indicates that the three top features are all related to ease of use. The most important “ideal” feature is ease of use for students. Since the students are the target audience an easily designed user interface is crucial. An argument can be made that when students have difficulty using a product offered by the library, complaints arise, and this may lead to a negative library experience. Second in importance is the ease of use for library staff. When staff are not comfortable using a system there are delays in getting students’ needed materials posted, leading to workflow issues and problems with turnaround times. The same argument may be made for faculty. The

TABLE 4 Responses Regarding the Value of Each Feature in an Ideal Reserves Management System

Reserves management system features	(1) Not important at all	(2) Not very important	(3) Neutral	(4) Somewhat important	(5) Very Important
Workflow management	0%	3%	5%	16%	76%
Copyright management	2%	3%	20%	27%	48%
Integration with course management system (Blackboard, etc.)	2%	1%	14%	33%	50%
Integration with ILS/LMS	1%	3%	25%	34%	38%
Authentication (with campus system)	0%	1%	9%	17%	74%
Ease of use for library staff	0%	1%	3%	17%	79%
Ease of use for faculty	5%	0%	9%	9%	77%
Ease of use for students	0%	0%	0%	5%	95%
Storage space for e-documents	1%	4%	8%	22%	65%

easier it is to use a reserves system, the more willing faculty are to use it and then report a positive library experience. In the middle of the list are authentication and integration. Remote authentication in particular is critical, especially in order to support distance education classes where students need access to online materials. All commercial course reserves systems do offer some type of authentication support and this feature should be used as widely as possible, in consultation with the campus IT department. (As an aside, when working with campus IT, be sure to develop policy and procedure for dealing with storage space for electronic materials. At the end of the semester, will e-materials be placed in a dark archive, deleted, or reused?) As for integration, 50% of respondents describe integration with a course management system as very important. Only 38% want integration with the ILS, yet using the library catalog to display course reserves is very easy and convenient, allowing students to look up materials such as books, e-books, or audiovisual material before requesting them from the reserve system.

Surprisingly, while the majority of respondents (48%) believe that copyright management is very important, an almost equal percentage (47%) believe that it is only somewhat important or of neutral concern. Copyright management ranks near the bottom of overall “ideal” features among respondents, but it also represents the widest range of responses. It is true that neither course management nor integrated library systems offer the librarian much control over copyright tracking and monitoring. The authors were surprised to see the drop in the number of respondents from 2008 to 2009 who indicated that a copyright management feature was important to them. Perhaps this is due to varied practices among libraries in how copyright laws are applied. There is no easy explanation for this change; it might be an

area for further research to determine how copyright permission is being managed at the institutions that responded.

The comments from respondents about their “ideal” system include the following:

- “Automatic link checking”
- “Reports”
- “Integration with Canada’s version of the Copyright Clearance Center’s database”
- “Web services to allow import of requests from the Web interface of the ‘ILS’”
- “Easy to find and manipulate the statistics by class, format, trends”
- “What we lack in our homegrown system is a way to easily weed old images from our server storage area”
- “Detailed statistical reports available so that usage can be tracked and analyzed”
- “Data entry (title keyword rather than Primary Title, Secondary Title, Author Field). Cannot have two links to one document. System permutes file names, does not allow order of files transferred via FTP so it requires a workaround.”
- “Supportive technical service”

It is important in considering these responses to note the volume of items processed by each library. It was noted earlier that workflow management and ease of use are considered desirable features in a reserve management system, and if a library is processing upwards of 10,000 reserve items annually, as were five of the libraries responding, this desire is understandable. The survey respondents were asked about the size of their institution and number of items on reserve, divided into print and electronic. Not surprisingly, the larger the institution, the greater the number of items placed on reserve. As listed in Table 5, 59 respondents state that fewer than 5,000 hard copy items are placed on reserve, while 54 respondents claim fewer than 5,000 items are placed on reserve electronically. In this survey, only one institution offers more than 25,000 hard copy materials on reserve, and another institution posts more than 25,000 items electronically.

TABLE 5 Responses Regarding How Many Items are on Reserve at Libraries Annually

	< 5,000 Items on Reserve	5,000–10,000 on Reserve	10,000± 15,000 on Reserve	15,000± 25,000 on Reserve	> 25,000 on Reserve
Print reserve: 66 responses	59	6	0	0	1
Electronic reserve: 65 responses	54	7	2	1	1

CONCLUSION

Although electronic reserve management systems have been in use now for a number of years, it seems clear that they are not meeting all of the needs of the libraries that offer course reserve services to their students and faculty members. Each of the systems discussed offer some benefits, but also have some drawbacks, some of which may discourage use of the system by other libraries. The results show that many libraries either do not use or do not know the full functionality of the commercial reserves systems. As with most technologies, change in products can be rapid; the companies that provide these systems may be working to address some of these perceived shortcomings. At present, it appears that using some combination of a reserve management system and either an ILS or course management system is enabling libraries to provide electronic course reserves to their campus communities in a timely and efficient manner.

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APPENDIX

Web-Based Survey Reserves Questionnaire

1. Does your library currently offer an electronic reserve service?
2. Do you use a reserve management system for this service?
3. What reserve management system do you use?
4. How is this service hosted?
5. Which of these features is currently available in the system you currently use?
 - a. Work-flow management (processes clear and easy to follow)

- b. Copyright management
 - c. Integration with course management system
 - d. Integration with library management system
 - e. Authentication using campus system
 - f. Ease of use for library staff
 - g. Ease of use for faculty (front-end system)
 - h. Ease of use for students
 - i. Storage space for electronic documents
 - j. Other features not listed
6. Please indicate (1 = not important; 5 = very important) the *value* of each of these features in an *ideal* reserves management system.
- a. Work-flow management (processes clear and easy to follow)
 - b. Copyright management
 - c. Integration with course management system
 - d. Integration with library management system
 - e. Authentication using campus system
 - f. Ease of use for library staff
 - g. Ease of use for faculty (front-end system)
 - h. Ease of use for students
 - i. Storage space for electronic documents
 - j. Other features not listed
7. Approximately how many items are placed on reserve at your institution annually?
8. What is the total student population at your institution?
9. Please tell us the name of your college/university.