Electronic Resources and Next-Generation Public Library Catalogs

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study examines the user experience of six public library catalogs (OPACs) in terms of the next-generation characteristics identified by library literature. One open source Integrated Library System (ILS), Evergreen, was compared to one proprietary system, Polaris. One library used its respective ILS alone, while the other libraries' catalogs used a third-party discovery layer in conjunction with the ILS. The purpose of this study is to compare open source versus proprietary ILSs and discovery layers in terms of their next-generation characteristics with particular attention to electronic resources, namely e-books. Of the six libraries compared, the two libraries that used the proprietary add-on BiblioCommons featured the most advanced next-generation catalog characteristics. The two ILSs that did not use any added layers offered the fewest next-generation traits. The catalogs of public libraries vary greatly in their offerings, but add-ons, such as BiblioCommons, enhance the user experience and the retrievability of electronic resources.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

The Online Public Access Catalogs (OPACs) of six public libraries were chosen to provide a comparison of open source and proprietary Integrated Library Systems (ILS) and discovery layers. One open source ILS, Evergreen, was compared with one proprietary ILS, Polaris. Three Evergreen libraries were compared to three Polaris

libraries. One of each library used its OPAC with an open source discovery layer, one of each used its OPAC with a proprietary discovery layer, and one of each used its OPAC alone. These libraries are Kent County Public Library, PaILS consortium libraries, Pemberton and District Public Library, Prince William Public Library, Darien Public Library, and Boston Public Library. The next-generation features of each library's OPAC were compared in terms of open source and proprietary products, with particular attention to electronic resources, namely electronic books (e-books).

Kent County Public Library (KCPL) serves approximately 20,000 residents in Kent County, Maryland (Breeding, 2012). KCPL is comprised of three branches and a books-by-mail program for the homebound, disabled, and institutionalized (Kent County Public Library, n.d.). Kent County uses the open source ILS Evergreen, hosted by Equinox, and does not use an added discovery layer (Breeding, 2012). The Pennsylvania Integrated Library System (PaILS) is a consortium that was formed in 2011 to develop a statewide ILS for its public, academic, school, and special libraries. PaILS was founded to "provide Pennsylvanians with a collaborative, high quality, open source integrated library system that is equitable, cost-effective, and promotes resource sharing among libraries statewide" (SPARK, n.d., p. 1). SPARK is the ILS created by PaILS and consists of the Evergreen platform with the open source discovery layer VuFind as its OPAC. Nearly forty libraries from the state-subsidized Millennium ILS have been migrated to SPARK with the aid of Health Sciences Library Consortium (HSLC), the non-profit vendor contracted to support migration and maintenance of the SPARK system.

Pemberton and District Public Library (PDPL), British Columbia, is a single branch library whose ILS is provided by the British Columbia SITKA Consortium (Breeding, 2012). The integrated library system used by PDPL and the consortium is Evergreen, hosted by Equinox, and PDPL uses BiblioCommons as its discovery layer. PDPL users may obtain library cards through InterLINK, a partnership of eighteen public libraries in British Columbia (BC), and may borrow a limited number of items from any library in BC using a BC OneCard (Pemberton & District Public Library, n.d.).

Serving over 400,000 residents, Prince William Public Library System (PWPLS) in northern Virginia is comprised of four full-service branches and six neighborhood libraries (Breeding, 2012). PWPLS circulates over 3.4 million items annually and owns nearly 850,000 items in its collection. Prince William Public Library uses the proprietary ILS Polaris without an added discovery layer.

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