

# Issues in Vendor/Library Relations — So You're Buying a New Integrated Library System: Have You Told Your Book Vendor Yet?

by **Ann-Marie Breaux** (Systems Vendor Liaison, YBP Library Services, 999 Maple Street, Contoocook, NH 03229)

Column Editor: **Bob Nardini** (Senior Vice President & Head Bibliographer, YBP Library Services, 999 Maple Street, Contoocook, NH 03229; Phone: 800-258-3774 x. 3251; Fax: 603-746-5628) <nardini@ybp.com>

*“You don't have to say you love me, just be close at hand”*

— Lyric from “You Don't Have to Say You Love Me,”  
by **Vicki Wickham & Simon Napier-Bell**

Over the past couple of years, it seems that more libraries than ever before have begun the process of selecting and implementing a new integrated library system. The last **NOTIS** sites are in the midst of converting, or at least looking for their new system. Many **DRA** sites viewed the purchase of **DRA** by **Sirsi** and the phasing out of **DRA's** system as the opportunity to consider a new system. Large consortia in Florida, New York, and elsewhere are in the midst of converting to **Ex Libris'** system, **Aleph**. Almost all libraries are modifying their local system or purchasing additional software to facilitate linking of electronic resources. Change is everywhere.

In reviewing a potential new integrated system, most libraries spend a great deal of time considering the look and usability of the **OPAC**, how easy it will be to circulate items, what is involved in data conversion from the existing system, and increasingly, how the system links to external electronic resources. Many of these libraries have also developed complex technical services relationships with their major monographic and serial vendors. As a new system is considered, these vendor interactions must be reviewed, to determine whether the same capabilities are supported or not, and whether any enhancements to the connectivity are possible. Based on **YBP's** experiences in working through systems changes with our customers over the past few years, I'd like to highlight some questions and considerations that a library might want to review.

**YBP** faced a similar series of questions when we began to automate portions of our warehouse. Ten years ago, we used hundreds of book carts to shelve and pull books in the warehouse. Much overhead went into keeping track of what items were on what cart, whether they were going onto or coming off of our warehouse shelves, collating shipments that spanned multiple book carts, and the like. We moved from using carts to a conveyor, picking books from the shelves into cartons as the conveyor line wound its way through the warehouse. At first we sought to replicate our cart procedures on the conveyor line, but as we became more comfortable with the technology, we began to exploit the different opportunities offered by the conveyor. For example, we don't have to keep a multi-box shipment collated throughout the

picking process anymore. We can quality check, seal, and ship the first box while its partners are still on the line, and then reassemble invoice data when we've filled the last box. Changing systems offered us a chance to reassess our processes, eliminate steps that had been rendered obsolete, and create a streamlined, more efficient materials flow.

Like a library system switch, **YBP's** warehousing switch put much stress on the current process. Our day-to-day business of receiving books and shipping them to customers cannot stop. Likewise, the day-to-day library technical services business of checking in journals, placing orders, paying bills, and cataloging books cannot stop — or at least not for very long — when a new system is installed.

Because of their breadth of experience with different integrated library systems, materials vendors can serve as a valuable resource to a library during system selection. I approach libraries' systems changes as an interested third-party observer, and have seen switches that have gone well and not so well. Standard technical services questions to discuss with a system vendor include whether their system offers the desired electronic ordering, invoicing, and workflow integration functionality, and whether that functionality is part of the base model or is a separately-purchased add-on. At certain points in the system selection process, libraries can gain useful perspectives from their materials vendors by discussing current implementations of the capabilities stated by the systems vendor. As materials vendors, we must maintain neutrality when discussing integrated library systems, but we are happy to share as much information as we can. We seek to provide information, not recommendations.

The two primary questions we hope a customer asks us during a system selection or conversion process:

1. Does my current workflow or set of services from you work with my new system?
2. What additional services might I be able to use?

As we step through a standard monographic workflow, various considerations arise at each point in the process. In terms of electronic ordering, different systems work with different standards, the most common in the US being

**BISAC**, **X12**, and **EDIFACT**. Systems offer varying data output, such as how the purchase order numbers are structured, or whether details like fund code, location code, and grid or branch copy information can be output in the electronic order. Some systems' electronic orders require an ISBN, and some do not. Some allow the library to pick the ISBN to be transmitted in the order, but most just transmit whichever ISBN is listed first in the bibliographic record. Each system records and outputs vendor account information in different ways, some requiring multiple vendor records for the same vendor if the library orders on multiple account numbers. Thus, it's important to review the data elements output in an electronic order and confirm that they will meet your requirements.

With electronic invoicing, the library faces similar questions and changes. The new system may allow for invoicing data to be embedded in a **MARC** bibliographic record. Invoicing may be moving from one standard used by the former system, such as **X12**, to another, such as **EDIFACT**. What is the invoicing matchpoint that the new system is expecting to find in the electronic invoice? Is that matchpoint solely a system-proprietary number like a PO number or line item number, or can it be a number supplied by the material vendor? For libraries with large approval plans, where there is no pre-existing purchase order in the library system, an ability to accept book vendor-supplied invoicing matchpoints is critical.

For **MARC** records, a more complex set of questions emerge, due to the multiple ways that libraries use **MARC** records. Can the system accept pre-order or selection records generated from the book vendor's online database? If so, what are the duplication control routines, and how complicated is it to finish off the order and transmit back to the book vendor? If the library chooses to order on the book vendor's online system, can the library's system accept electronic order confirmation records, which construct a copy of the bibliographic and order data in their local system? For cataloging records, what is the overlay matchpoint? The biggest area of variability we see is what sort of order, invoice, and barcode data can be embedded in the **MARC** record. If the library's system allows for the acceptance of order or invoice data in a **MARC** record, are the field mappings for the data prescribed by the systems vendor, or flexible, to be agreed upon by the library and book vendor? If the library receives both bibliographic data and invoicing data from the materials vendor, will the new system be ex-

*continued on page 88*

pecting one integrated file or two separate ones?

Finally, the mechanics of file moving and loading can vary greatly from system to system. Are file delivery and pickup processes automated or manual? Which library department is in control of file exchanges: Technical Services or Systems? How complicated is the setup process, and how well-documented by the systems and materials vendors? What is the testing process? It's been our experience that some libraries can set up electronic ordering in a matter of minutes, output a test file or two, and then go into regular production mode. For others, it can take weeks or even months, depending on the complexity of the arrangement and the maturity of the systems and materials vendors' capabilities.


One of the most critical steps is analyzing any existing custom programming, and whether it will transition to the new system or not. Many libraries developed internal programs to overcome shortcomings of older systems, or to enhance workflow efficiencies. Some libraries have grafted electronic ordering programs onto their system. Others have created custom programming to move payment voucher data from their library system to their parent body's accounting system. With the system migration, chances are these custom tools will either become obsolete or require significant rewriting.

As a library enters a transition period between old system and new, there are a number of actions they can undertake to minimize transition woes. We recommend that libraries minimize the number of open monographic orders they'll have to migrate between systems. Migrating and setting up serial check-in records tends to be a major project, so the fewer the open monographic orders to have to deal with, the better. We see libraries scheduling transitions at different points in their fiscal years. For libraries which transition in the middle of fiscal

years, and have financial data split between their old and new systems, the book vendor's online system may provide expenditure and other financial reports to help span the gap.

Most libraries have a transition blackout period lasting from a week or two to several months, where routine technical services work is difficult or impossible. During that time, the library must determine whether they will suspend various tasks or create workarounds. Book vendors can usually suspend approval plan or other shipments for some period of time, as long as we have reasonable notice. If the library opts to continue receiving shipments, but cannot receive items on the new system during the blackout period, then additional storage locations or shelves may be needed within the library. If a library will not be able to load cataloging records or electronic invoicing for a period of time, then they may need to arrange with the book vendor to store the files longer than normal, or else pick up the files and store them locally until they can be loaded. If a library will be unable to pay invoices for some period of time, it's imperative to notify the materials vendor; some libraries make prepayments or set up small deposit accounts to cover the transition period.

Looking ahead, once the library is up and running on the new system, if desired workflows are not supported, then the library can work with the systems and materials vendors to try to develop system enhancements. Both systems and materials vendors typically have long development lists which must be prioritized, but we're always seeking to make our systems work better for our customers.

The selection and implementation of a new integrated library system is one of the larger, more expensive decisions that libraries face. In formulating RFPs, and then selecting and implementing the new system, we hope you will take advantage of the library's primary materials vendors as a source of information on the system's proven capabilities and as a gateway to other libraries who have faced similar questions. We promise to be close at hand. 

## "Linking Publishers, Vendors and Librarians"



### Against the Grain

#### Uncommon ...

*Against the Grain* is your key to the latest news about libraries, publishers, book jobbers, and subscription agents. *ATG* is a unique collection of reports on the issues, literature, and people that impact the world of books, journals, and electronic information.



### Against the Grain

#### Unconventional...

*ATG* is published six times a year, in February, April, June, September, November, and December/January. A six issue subscription is available for only \$40 U.S. (\$50 Canada, \$70 foreign), making it an uncommonly good buy for all that it covers. Make checks payable to *Against the Grain, LLC* and mail to:

**Katina Strauch**  
209 Richardson Avenue  
MSC 98, The Citadel  
Charleston, SC 29409

Name					
Address					
City		State	Zip		
Company		Phone			
Email					