Joined up thinking

Bishop Grosseteste University (BGU), Lincoln, has become the first UK institution to go live with OCLC’s WorldShare Management Services (WMS). With WMS, library staff at BGU have modernised workflows, making savings on both IT infrastructure and staff time as well as increasing student satisfaction levels, writes Sarah Bartlett.

‘WE’RE a growing university, and we started to feel that our old system was holding us back’, said Emma Sansby, Head of Library Services. ‘WMS is a modern and evolving staff-facing system, with a web interface which will feel familiar to students. At the same time, we wanted to modernise and improve the student experience.’ Emma also saw that the cloud-based WMS, hosted off-site at OCLC’s European Data Centre in London, would relieve pressure on library and IT Services teams, who would no longer have to maintain systems in-house.

Nicola Perry, BGU’s Systems Librarian, is impressed with a number of functional areas in WMS. ‘The whole of the staff interface is intuitive’, she says. ‘Reservations seem much easier in WMS, as does cataloguing, which simply involves attaching local holdings to the centralised record on the shared WorldCat catalogue. One colleague, who is fairly new to libraries, told me that someone who had never worked in a library could figure out from the interface how to issue a book without any training. It’s an intuitive system, and it’s also very forgiving: it’s easy to undo work if someone makes a mistake.’

Cloud-based collaboration

Andrew Pace, OCLC Executive Director of Networked Library Services, who has led the development of WMS at OCLC, experienced a light-bulb moment when he realised that the future of library technology lay with cooperation in the cloud. ‘I could see that it was all about community,’ he says. ‘We had a unique technological opportunity with the aggregation of data supported by OCLC, the world’s largest library cooperative, and the member-libraries who knew that a new direction was needed.’

OCLC’s member libraries set great store by collaboration and for very good reason – around the world they are attempting to meet users’ growing expectations of their services, while working with ever-diminishing resources. The goals of library collaboration and those of WMS are the same – to save time and money by simplifying back-office workflows. Whilst there is unquestionably a tension between competition and collaboration across higher education today, OCLC’s member libraries are insistent that collaboration holds sway, pointing to the efficiencies that decades of cooperative cataloguing have delivered.

Game-changing technology

Andrew points to the OCLC WorldShare Platform, on which WMS applications run, as part of a game-changing technology trend in libraries. Library technology thought leader Marshall Breeding defines these platforms in terms of their ability to manage all formats of library materials and ‘their service-oriented architecture with web-based interfaces designed for deployment through SaaS (Software as a Service)’, which he believes will reshape the industry over the next decade. Breeding reported that OCLC’s WorldShare was the first to emerge in the marketplace, having entered general release in December 2011 (see http://bit.ly/12bA9sD).

‘OCLC now has around 200 libraries worldwide committed to WMS and more than 120 live, including several that have been live for over two years’, Andrew says. From the outset, the global dimension of WMS appealed to staff at BGU, one of five libraries in Europe currently implementing WMS. ‘It’s a global system, and we like the way that people around the world are continuously developing and enhancing the system’, says Emma.

Efficiency and return on investment

‘Efficiency is the biggest piece of feedback that we’ve received from the global WMS user base,’ says Andrew, and for Nicola, system integration was a key capability. ‘From a systems point of view, one of the key things was being able to link up to other systems,’ she says,
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‘with automatic links to university student records and the finance system in particular. At the moment we’ve got a lot of separate systems and I think there’s considerable scope for efficiencies, saving staff time and eliminating the errors that can creep in when you’re copying data from one system to another. So a joined-up system was important to me.’

BGU can look across at other higher education institutions to gauge the return on investment that WMS is already delivering in US WMS libraries. Pepperdine University (California) for example, claims savings of $50,000 annually, in terms of total cost of ownership, with efficiencies in technical services, shared data, outsourced hardware and software upgrades. Bucknell University (Pennsylvania) was able to reallocate 2.5 FTE in their Technical Services area and purchase institutional repository software as a result of time and cost savings.

Dr Lynn Futch, Dean for Library Services, Ogeechee Technical College, cites impressive library workflow savings: ‘WMS has made it possible for us to streamline processes to get books on shelves and into students’ hands. What used to take a couple of days to accomplish can now be done in a couple of hours,’ she says.

The world’s largest library database

OCLC’s discovery service, WorldCat Local, was another attraction for Bishop Grosseteste University. As the world’s largest library database, WorldCat holds metadata for every conceivable physical and electronic format, as well as providing access to 1.267 billion articles, videos, books, photographs, maps and other library materials. ‘It’s going to be a lot easier for students to use’, says Nicola. ‘It’s a joined-up system where students can search on both printed book stock and the online resources. At the moment, different materials are held in different places; they’ve got to go to different databases for journals, and some students simply never discover the full range of resources available. WorldCat Local fits in more with how people tend to search nowadays. It’s more modern.’

Library staff foresee that this will improve search results, enhancing overall student satisfaction with the library.

‘WorldCat is the central core database of WMS’, says Andrew, ‘and that changes the nature of acquisitions and discovery, opening up the network effect to library workflows and providing a discovery layer. The WMS and WorldCat Local experience gives a unified feel to both next generation discovery and next generation management, with one system to maintain and one set of data, so I think it’s the best of both worlds for libraries.’

Implementation

Staff from BGU and OCLC kicked off the implementation project in 2012, and staff-members from both organisations took part in fortnightly conference calls to review progress on activities such as data preparation, configuration refinements and library staff training. OCLC has set up a WMS User Support Centre, with a full-time staff-member who works with the WMS community, providing news and information and moderating forum discussions. Staff at Bishop Grosseteste

Success: it’s different for everyone. For some it’s their graduation. For others it’s a research breakthrough, discovering their family tree or learning a new skill. But however you define success, people can look to their library to help them achieve it.

OCLC WorldShare provides the means to focus staff, time, energy and resources on the user and not on routine back-office operations. The OCLC WorldShare platform gives libraries a place to share development, enhancing the speed they can deliver innovation. Worldshare Management Services have reinvented workflow to represent the diversity of collections and streamline the processes that govern them. All of this, to equip your library to focus on what you do best – help users achieve success.

Because the more we share, the better life gets.
University have made use of this important facility in a number of ways. ‘It’s useful’, says Nicola, ‘because we get short bite-sized tutorials which we can dip into before working in WMS, and they complement the recordings we have of our training sessions, which are longer.’ Emma has made use of the forums within the Centre to resolve issues.

Deployment of the system involved only two days of system downtime, when data was in transit, causing no operational difficulties at that time of year. Immediately afterwards, Nicola performed a number of checks to make sure that the data in the new system met her expectations. ‘It was a very smooth and straightforward process’, recalls Nicola. ‘The disruption was minimal.’ The library launched the system to students and staff at the beginning of the following week.

Emma and Nicola have also enjoyed working with OCLC on the implementation project. ‘It’s been a completely positive experience’, says Emma. ‘Library staff find it very easy to use, and we’re looking forward to seeing how the students and academic staff receive WorldCat Local, then exploring the capabilities of WMS further in the new academic year, to look at streamlining our processes further.’

Watch a video of BGU’s Emma and Nicola talking about OCLC’s WMS.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=oGFkUJW51is