

On the Dublin Core front

by Norm Medeiros

Associate Librarian of the College
Haverford College
Haverford, PA

ERMS Implementation: Navigating the Wilderness

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"Tis easy to see, hard to foresee." -- Benjamin Franklin

ABSTRACT

This article describes important considerations for commercial ERMS implementers. It identifies the value proposition in choosing to purchase an ERMS. The paper describes challenges common to all libraries, irrespective of commercial ERMS chosen.

KEYWORDS

electronic resource management ; electronic resource management systems ; ERMS implementation

Electronic resource management is the area in which I've had to focus my attention the past several years. It's been the cause of numerous headaches and other physical ailments. The mental consequences of this work have yet to be diagnosed, but they too I'm sure will prove chronic. Late last year, I was invited to talk to a group of librarians who were preparing to implement electronic resource management systems (ERMS). Having been down that bumpy road a couple of years earlier, the speaking invitation provided an opportunity to reflect on the challenges my colleagues and I endured as we migrated from a locally-developed ERMS to a commercial product. Given the hotness of this topic, I think there's value in recounting these considerations.

Becoming familiar with the ERMI specification

The report¹ of the Digital Library Federation (DLF) Electronic Resource Management Initiative (ERMI) is masterful. Rich and visionary, it accommodates an impressive array of functionality and data. Since commercial e-resource system vendors have used the ERMI specification as a roadmap on which to model their systems, it's important for libraries implementing ERMS to understand the ERMI framework. This understanding should include the functional requirements -- *Appendix A* of the report -- that describe what an ERMS ought to do. Equally important is the data structure -- *Appendix E* of the report -- which defines the entities and their associated elements. A modest understanding of these concepts facilitates communication with ERMS vendors.

1. Jewell, T., et al. *Electronic Resource Management: Report of the DLF ERM Initiative* (Washington, D.C.: Digital Library Federation, 2004)

Importing data from existing systems/spreadsheets

The value of understanding the ERMI data structure manifests during the process of migrating data into the ERMS. Administrative metadata within a container such as a locally-developed ERMS or a spreadsheet can be mapped to the ERMI data structure. This exercise will result in exact matches – one-to-one element correspondence with the ERMI data structure; partial matches – where a single element used locally is more discretely defined within the ERMI specification, or vice versa; and failed matches, where a local field has no ERMI equivalent. Working with your vendor to determine how and where to move elements from the latter two categories will minimize manual processing following the load.

Assigning values

Several dozen ERMI fields are defined to use value lists. Examples include *resource type*, *license status*, and *pricing model*. The ERMI report points to pre-existing value lists in some cases; in others, it provides recommended values. Nevertheless, it's useful to develop institution-specific values ahead of implementation if possible. In working through this tedious task, you will ensure that data values are standard, as well as results and reports generated from these values. It would be beneficial for the e-resource community to share library-derived value lists in order to assist those currently in the throes of ERMS implementation.

Staffing and workflows

Understanding the functional and data needs of e-resource management activities, and who will do the work, are major components of ERMS implementation, but also areas in which it is difficult to feel confident. It may be worthwhile to inventory current practices as a way of identifying areas that can be improved through change, be that centralization or elimination of unnecessary steps. It is also important to determine whether e-resources will move through a dedicated e-only workflow, or be handled by the same set of staff that handles materials in traditional formats. Individual library circumstances will likely dictate the better approach, though I'd contend that insinuating the ERMS into the everyday work lives of the entire technical/electronic services staff is more challenging than an organizational structure that carves out a core set of staff who deals only with e-resources, and by extension, the ERMS.

Workflow tracking within the ERMS

Revamped workflows are only as strong as their ability to be performed in a timely manner. The great promise of electronic resource management systems, in my opinion, is workflow communication and tracking. Unlike purchasing a physical object such as a book that can be seen as it weaves its way through the various processes associated with it, the status of an electronic resource can be very hard to pinpoint. The ambitious use of ERMS as a communication tool, alerting staff when tasks need to be done or information needs to be disseminated, can fill a void in current e-resource management practice. Ticklers that email staff based on the date of some occurrence such as beginning of a trial, renewal reminder, or termination date serve a purpose, but are relatively unsophisticated compared to a workflow tracking mechanism predicated on the status of a resource, from the moment a decision is made to evaluate it through renewal or termination.

Data propagation

Several libraries have purchased e-resource management systems from vendors other than their ILS provider, warranting the need to build interoperability across platforms. Acquisitions data include elements where necessary redundancy between the ILS and ERMS occurs, and with the SUSHI protocol now a NISO draft standard, it's even more crucial for ERMS implementers to find an

automated means of moving acquisitions data into their systems. A subcommittee of the DLF ERMI Phase 2 steering group is currently investigating the feasibility of such interoperability. Their preliminary report is available at
< http://www.haverford.edu/library/DLF_ERMI2/ACQ_ERMS_white_paper.pdf>.

Summary remarks

Libraries need sophisticated systems that facilitate communication and workflow, especially as the prospect of mainstream purchase of e-books grows closer. Moreover, as collection decisions are made consortially and the majority of resources purchased become electronic, libraries will require an ERMS to maintain effective control of these coveted, expensive resources. ERMS implementation strategies must include staff buy-in such that all involved recognize the importance of incorporating a new tool into their work. Library administrators and implementation managers need to foster a culture within their institutions where e-resource management in its many forms is seen as mission critical. In accomplishing this task, the toughest implementation challenge will be behind you.