Covenant College embraces OCLC WorldShare Management Services as its partner for the 21st century

Derived from an address to the OCLC Global Council by Tad Mindeman, Director of Library Services at Covenant College

Situation

When Covenant considered a move to a new integrated library system, our perspective focused not on the gee-whiz aspect of the technology, but attempted to ascertain how a particular tool might best contribute to a better learning experience for our users. We knew that our users were becoming relatively frustrated by the organization and accessibility of our collections and resources, and we feared this could be inhibiting effective learning.

By early 2010, we believed that information management needed focused attention. Compounding this was a concern that the campus information technology department would not be able to support an increasingly technologically dependent library. I was determined to relieve these colleagues from having to maintain the hardware and software associated with traditional, server-based library systems. After surveying the product landscape over the next few months, we became convinced that OCLC's WorldShare™ Management Services offered the most potential for us to make some radical improvements.

Solution

In September 2010, the Covenant Library applied for WorldShare™ Management Services early adopter status and was accepted soon after. Little Covenant College was about to take a big plunge.

We received a project schedule in November and the news that we would be migrating with a cohort of eight early adopters. I was delighted to learn that most of the libraries in the cohort were similar in size and character.

The formal interaction among cohort members for training began in late February and concluded two months later. The cohort method provided a forum for peer support, shared expertise and mutual encouragement. Through phone conversations, webinars and a forum on the WorldShare User Support Center dedicated to our cohort, group members could compare change management strategies and anticipated workflow issues. OCLC® staff led the cohort through weekly webinar training sessions, which were all recorded for convenient access later, and provided excellent one-on-one follow-up support.

As part of the training, OCLC staff asked that institutions share with the entire group how WorldShare Management Services might change our internal workflows, promote new external collaboration, or contribute to our overall effectiveness. Taking

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At A Glance

- Located on Lookout Mountain, Georgia
- Enrolls about 1,100 students from 43 states and 20 countries
- Kresge Memorial library has a collection consisting of 80,000 print volumes, over 95,000 e-books and almost 250,000 total bibliographic records in the catalog
the time to think about these larger issues instead of remaining fixated on migration minutiae was worth the time and effort.

The cohort approach promoted productive partnerships among group members and with OCLC staff, and allowed us to see the similarities and differences inherent in our libraries. It was nice knowing the group's collective expertise was easily available for consultation. Using the cohort approach in migration provided a rich opportunity to enhance inter-institutional cooperation.

On April 27, 2011, Covenant successfully implemented WorldShare Management Services and WorldCat® Local. The migration process was amazingly simple and straightforward. Because we had already completed a batchload of our bibliographic database when we installed WorldCat Local "quick start," that saved about three weeks and allowed us to go live earlier than anticipated.

Implementing change in any organizational setting is almost always stressful. Our staff's response to the move to WorldShare Management Services has run the gamut, from unbridled joy to dumbfounded confusion. And this all occurred after we had carefully counted the cost and emotionally prepared for the impending change. I can't imagine working with a more conscientious, gifted and servant-minded team of folks, yet being an early adopter for an evolving product was difficult. We all learned to flex, to think and to react creatively.

Results

We've been using WorldShare Management Services for six months. Eliminating traditional tasks associated with copy cataloging has increased the productivity of our cataloger (we have only one) by 44 percent for the same time period in 2010. By reducing the time needed to perform copy cataloging, she is now able to perform more original cataloging and will contribute her expertise to a new project, organizing and describing local digital collections.

WorldCat Local has increased our interlibrary loan activity by 54 percent over the same time period in 2010. As more institutions are exposed to our holdings through WorldCat, we are seeing a decrease in the difference between the number of items received and those provided to other institutions.

We know for at least the next three years, WorldShare Management Services will dramatically reduce the total cost of operations associated with our integrated library system. Beyond that, we don't anticipate the cost savings declining. And the cost calculations look even brighter when one considers that our monthly OCLC subscription includes WorldCat Local. Purchasing a new integrated library system and discovery tool separately from other vendors would not have been financially possible for Covenant.

Many academic libraries are facing the same challenges, and are actively searching for solutions. As I have visited with other library administrators about WorldShare Management Services, I've learned that libraries are now prepared to take their existing culture of cooperation to new radical levels. Thanks to tools like WorldShare Management Services and WorldCat Local, libraries can now envision new group-oriented ventures to better steward limited resources, maximize resource sharing opportunities and explore revolutionary ideas in collaborative collection development. These tools allow us to manage information in creative new ways that would have seemed impossible just a few short years ago.

Covenant College took a calculated risk to take an active role in realizing Webscale. In our community, the library staff seeks to contribute to positive learning outcomes by attempting to mirror the high-touch mentoring approach used by our teaching faculty in the classroom. We have to be convinced that each tool we select will help us fulfill our ultimate mission, and will support our distinctive philosophical framework. We believe that WorldShare Management Services meet these qualifications. And although the journey as an early adopter was challenging at times, we have great expectations for the services and have fully embraced them as a partner as we charge ahead through the 21st century.