RMIT University
Rethinking Digital Resource Management

RMIT UNIVERSITY

With a single interface and an integrated approach to all source material – electronic, print and digital – Alma is breaking down the collection silos in the Library

ExLibris
a ProQuest Company

"Staff are really enjoying working with a fully integrated product. And that's probably one of the biggest advantages we can see with Alma."
Stephen Gillespie, Associate Director, Library Resources at RMIT University

RMIT University was using five different and disconnected applications for various Library tasks, including print and digital resource management, discovery, archiving, and more. Successfully handling or finding Library resources required knowledge of where an item could be found, what format it was in, and how to use the relevant software interface.

The complexity of making all kinds of resources available and accessible through multiple applications was becoming a major disadvantage for both university staff and students. They ran the risk of missing important or relevant items simply because of the multiplicity of interfaces they had to navigate. Senior Library personnel concluded that, as expressed by a member of the Library Executive, students "should be able to discover anything that's relevant to their course and their time at RMIT in one place. It's as simple as that."

The need for greater clarity and coherence had also become urgent for the university. The digital resource management application the Library was using was an older generation solution that no longer met their needs. As digital materials are important to many, if not all, of the learning, teaching and research objectives of the university, a solution was needed. On the one hand, all the digital objects and their associated metadata needed to be immediately migrated intact into a new system. On the other hand, Library management wanted to migrate the digital collections into a more integrated resource management platform.

The Alma Integration

The Library staff at RMIT University had already begun to see the power of a coherent user experience after adopting Ex Libris Primo in 2011. While they were able to present a more unified discovery interface for Library users and researchers, it was still incomplete because resource management at the Library remained diversified.

Having had a great experience working with Ex Libris, and in light of the expected ease of integration, the university adopted Alma in 2013 as their resource management solution. RMIT University was only the second library in Australia to do so.

Alma's flexible configuration options meant that RMIT University was able to work with Ex Libris to suit the solution's automated workflows to the Library's specific needs. What the Library staff discovered, though, was that Alma made them rethink the way they were managing, and providing access to, their academic resources.

Ex Libris Alma was then quickly and efficiently put to work. With a single interface and an integrated approach to all source material – electronic, print and digital – Alma began breaking down the collection silos in the Library.

A single rich and automated resource management workflow, no matter the type of resource, introduced much greater operational efficiency. This, in turn, meant that library staff needed minimal training, as the same intuitive process applied to all collections.

Collaboration for a Successful Digital Migration

When RMIT University started using Alma, it was not specifically for their digital collections. However, the Library decision-makers knew they needed a solution that could manage those assets as well.

Thus, ever since Alma was adopted, the Library has been consistently undertaking digitization of specific collections in the art, design and architecture fields. This has included cataloguing the objects, providing metadata, and conversion. The most recent initiative is a partnership with Ex Libris to design and execute an effective migration of existing digital objects and their metadata into Alma. Digitized or migrated resources include PDFs, higher degree theses, images, movies, and the like.

"We have seen that Alma, including its integration with Amazon 3 cloud storage, is a sustainable, long-term option for managing and providing access to the university's digital collections."
Stephen Gillespie, Associate Director, Library Resources at RMIT University

While tools for migration are standard within Alma, some of the digital objects stored at RMIT University are quite large and require lengthy load times. In response to this need, Ex Libris introduced a new "bulk ingest" mode enabling institutions to upload multiple files with a single click.

Ultimately, RMIT University will migrate around 60,000 digital objects and their metadata, representing 15 separate collections, into Alma, where they will then be made available in Primo as well. "We have seen that Alma, including its integration with Amazon 3 cloud storage, is a sustainable, long-term option for managing and providing access to the university's digital collections," said the Associate Director, Library Resources

Feedback from the Field

Feedback from Library staff after the Alma deployment has included high praise for the product's comprehensiveness and efficiency.

The staff has also found Alma's analytics and reporting features to be both constructive and easy to use. Reporting incorporates the key data on collection usage that RMIT University Librarians want to see, including usage data, without having to access another website or application. Alma analytics are also regularly shared with senior university staff, enabling management to determine the best use of funds and helps them meet industry benchmarks.

Senior Library personnel have been very gratified by Ex Libris' responsiveness, from configuration to ongoing support, as well as in monthly product updates. They highlighted that Alma gets better and better with each new release.

Responding to the Metrics of the Future

With fully migrated digital collections, the RMIT University Library staff will use Alma analytics to measure the impact of the transition on discovery through Primo. A fuller and more accurate picture than was previously available is expected to then emerge regarding usage patterns of particular collections.

Looking forward, the RMIT University Library will be able to directly incorporate digital resources in academic reading lists through Ex Libris Leganto. The university is currently in the process of configuring and integrating this streamlined and interactive reading list management solution.

In light of the success seen with the first collections imported into Alma, Library personnel have sought to expand its use by actively encouraging more academic faculties (colleges) to digitize their in-house analog resources. This would make additional assets, as well as additional digital items, available to students through Alma and Primo.

Alma's capabilities support RMIT University's plans to provide more online courses in the future, which means that many students will not need to physically come onto campus at all. While there have always been courses with online components, the Library will have to adapt and respond to a more strategic change in meeting the needs of students taking full online courses remotely.

In this regard, the RMIT University Library is positioned well, as its staff is already catering to thousands of offshore students. The Library system will continue refining these services, which means the use of innovative applications such as Alma, Primo and Leganto to best provide online students with the resources they need to succeed.

ExLibris®
a ProQuest Company