

- Live with Ex Libris Alma since 2013
- Report date: 2015



University of York and Ex Libris

The University of York is a research-intensive university with an expanding main campus and two smaller campuses supporting 16,000 undergraduate and post-graduate students. There are two library locations, and a library staff of over 100 FTE. York's collections include 1 million print volumes, 650,000 e-books, and subscriptions to 13,000 e-journals and 450 print journals.

Previous ILS/Systems: Ex Libris Aleph, SFX, Verde

Summary of institutional benefits:

- Enables new services for all users
- Accurate data through batch changes in Alma improves the user experience in Primo
- Analytics is accessible and supports staff activities in all departments

Moving to Alma

The University of York Library has a strong culture of improving service for users. After many years on one management system, the Library was ready for a change that reflected its vision for excellence in service. Sarah Thompson, Head of Collections, explains that the Library hoped to find a system that would match their aspirations, looking to the future and new, streamlined ways of working. The University was already moving to the cloud, and the Library Systems staff wanted to free up time to focus on applications rather than on infrastructure maintenance. While the Library already had integrated teams to manage both print and electronic resources, the systems that were used to manage those resources were separate, creating duplicate work.

The Information Services Directorate at the University of York, which encompasses IT, the Library, and Archives, had developed a strategic framework with specific outcomes relating to improved discovery of and

access to content, process improvement, and staff capability and culture. Alma matched the way York wanted to operate. It offered one integrated system to manage print and electronic resources. Alma uses web-based, open interfaces so that it could be integrated with other systems, including external campus systems. The York library saw the potential of Alma to enable change, add new value-added services, and allow them to expand staff capacity and capability, reinforcing a culture of continuous improvement and innovation.



Impact of Alma

Alma Enables New Services

Alma enabled the York library to introduce new services that highlight their commitment to excellent customer service. The University of York has a small, specialized library at a campus in the center of York, about a half hour away from the main campus. Alma offered the possibility of a new book delivery service to this location, allowing users to request books to be delivered to their library through Primo. A pilot in the autumn term resulted in the movement of 3,000 items, delivered within 24 hours of the request. This change was easy to implement and reflected the York library culture of finding ways to make the library experience better for their users.



“Alma Analytics provides a user-friendly environment that is safe for experimentation and learning”

Kingsley Boulton, Information Systems Librarian

According to Paula Mountain-Agar, Customer Services Manager, new services such as these can be introduced thanks to the availability and flexibility of Alma’s configuration menus. Trained library staff can create new user statuses and loan policies, test them in the Sandbox, and implement them without requiring Systems or vendor support. An additional benefit of implementing these changes, is that disabled users at York can now make their own requests through Primo for delivery of materials to their location instead of requiring staff assistance. Users at the other campus sites feel more connected to the library and library services. The York library has seen the impact of this customer service improvement, winning a Customer Services Excellence award in 2014, which recognized their increased level of service to all types of users. This achievement was made easier by using the functionality of Alma.

Data Manipulation

York has made extensive use of Alma’s batch change capabilities to provide accurate data for users searching in Primo, for example by reducing redundancies in library names and locations in the main building.

The ability to modify sets of bibliographic records with normalization rules is very flexible in Alma. York staff are able to design multiple changes in one routine, test them before applying them, and then set up the batch change process to run at regular intervals. This functionality is particularly useful when importing files of e-book records from providers. York also applies normalization rules to bibliographic records to meet requirements for publishing records to external databases. In holdings records, York has been able to modify data in certain subfields to permit the automatic creation of the 866 holdings summary field. According to Kingsley Boulton, Information Systems Librarian, this type of action is easy to manage in Alma.

York has reviewed and reduced their user categories and loan rules in order to support students who may be off-campus when their checked-out items are requested. Staff can create sets of user records in Analytics and run a process to update the user information for this group and assign loan rules. The outcome of this effort was an improved ability to serve part-time students and those working in off-campus placements.



This was a change in service they had long discussed but found difficult to implement before Alma.

Analytics

In the past, Kingsley Boulton, Information Systems Librarian, produced reports for staff or created custom services to allow staff to run their own reports. After implementing Alma, York spent several months considering their reporting needs. Kingsley worked on this process with a group of interested staff from different functional areas. These staff now can develop their own reports independently, and approach Kingsley only if they need assistance, or for more complex queries that require his expertise with SQL. More staff are involved with Analytics now, leading to growing expertise. According to Kingsley, Alma Analytics provides a user-friendly environment that is safe for experimentation and learning.



James Coates, Administrator for Collections Services, saw the potential of Analytics for developing financial reports. He needs to provide a monthly report of unpaid invoices, and can produce it easily at the end of each month. Through widgets and dashboards, he can make desired financial reports available to relevant staff. For example, Academic Liaison Librarians can track orders placed and received against their department funds. The dashboards also provide access to reports of requests by user category and loans by academic department. These reports are used at library assessment meetings each year to demonstrate the usage of the library by each academic department.

Fulfillment staff use Analytics as

well. Paula Mountain-Agar points out that she does not have a systems background, but she is able to go into Analytics and generate the reports she wants. For example, she can easily create a list of users due to graduate, preview the report to make sure it has the data required, and then make it available to anyone who needs it. She can set reports to run regularly, run others on demand, and tailor reports to the needs of the department.

The Collections Services team is using data generated by Alma Analytics to support staff deployment decisions. York has created a pool of staff who are available to supplement different library teams based on the volume of their work and the staffing needs of projects. Analytics helps the team analyze where staff are needed, based on the statuses of materials, user requests, and projected activity, and make appropriate staff assignments.

E-Book Record Loading

Import profiles and normalization rules support record loading by staff for e-book packages. Previously this had required a lengthy process of retrieving files and having systems staff manipulate, load, and test the data in a monthly cycle that took several days of work by several people. Now staff in the metadata team can manage the process in a couple of hours whenever the files are available. Once a profile and rules have been created, they can be easily replicated and modified for additional e-book packages. Record loads are no longer limited to once a month, providing improved access to e-books for the York user community.



Staff Capability and Culture



Alma has supported the efforts at York to increase staff development. During their implementation, York started with a very small core project team, but later involved a wider group, known as the Alma Tsars. These staff did a lot of testing of Alma functionality, worked together to reinforce their training, and then trained other staff members. The group now looks at and tests monthly releases and updates internal documentation. The creation of this group provided a development opportunity for library assistants and other staff. They had the opportunity to give

presentations and wrote local documentation, which is stored on the Library's wiki and open to all staff for comments and updating.

The monthly releases provide an opportunity for all staff to think about the new features and make adjustments to workflows and processes to take advantage of them. Reading the release notes is built into everyone's expectations and ways of working. Instead of a top-heavy approach controlled by systems staff, all staff are involved and take responsibility to see how Alma helps them to do their work.