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**Taking apart the Library System**  
*The monolithic integrated LMS is splitting  
up into its smaller component parts,  
realising a long-held dream of many librarians.*

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I've been involved in hundreds of library management system (LMS) procurement processes. It's a time-consuming, expensive and competitive first-past-the-post system. Vendors don't get anything for coming second. Librarians aren't always happy either. After sitting through weeks of product demonstrations they have often said to me that they wished they could have the circulation module from one supplier, the acquisitions module from another and the catalogue from another still. But that isn't possible. Well not yet.

Paradoxically in the early days of library systems that is exactly what you had do. BLCMP (the precursor to Talis) only did cataloguing. Innovative Interfaces provided an acquisitions system and it was a long time before it developed a fully-fledged LMS. The piecing together of these components into full library systems could be difficult and expensive but it was helped by pioneering work by libraries in developing one of the first global computer standards – Marc.

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During the 1980s and 90s the LMS became progressively more integrated and added new modules. This certainly made for more efficient workflows in libraries. By the 1990s development had reached a plateau and products became less differentiated. The core functionality of an LMS is now defined, for the UK at least, in the CILIP-supported 'core specification' developed by Juliet Leeves<sup>1</sup>. The UKCS covers seven core modules: Cataloguing, Opac, Circulation, Acquisitions, Serials, Inter-Library Loan and Management Information.

**The notion of a comprehensive, integrated LMS has in fact always been an illusion.**

However, this scoping of an integrated LMS is actually quite narrow. In order for libraries to meet their overall requirement they must buy a range of add-on products – for example, bibliographic data, self-service terminals, booking systems and technology to handle library notices through telephone and SMS messages, etc. The notion of a comprehensive, integrated LMS has in fact always been an illusion. To varying degrees these add-ons need integration with the core modules and so the importance of standards grows. 3M developed the Standard Interface Protocol (SIP) to enable their self-service terminals to communicate with potentially any LMS. It is now a robust and widely used standard, adopted by other self-service providers and most LMS vendors. It wasn't just library domain standards either that helped this process of integration. As LMS vendors introduced third party relational databases (RDBMS) into the heart of their products, standard computing tools like SQL and ODBC could be used to connect to third party non-library specific products, and Microsoft Access or Business

<sup>1</sup> See CILIP web site. <http://www.cilip.org.uk/professionalguidance/lms/corespecification.htm>

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Objects could become library 'management information' packages. Indeed the value of narrowly conceived 'library standards' is diminishing. The web is now the major global driving force. One of the key purposes of the World Wide Web Consortium is 'evolving the World Wide Web toward a true information infrastructure'<sup>2</sup> and one of the primary ways it does this is through standards. However, if these standards are to make an impact in increasing the interoperability potential in the library domain, much work still needs to be done and libraries need powerful motivation. ExLibris made a critical breakthrough with its SFX 'link resolver'<sup>3</sup>. SFX met a key need in academic libraries in helping them make better use of their expensive print and electronic journal collections. Non-ExLibris LMS customers wanted it too and, because it embraced the web, integration with non-ExLibris systems was relatively easy.

**In these pioneering days libraries will need much more innovation awareness and many more skills.**

Diversity and choice of products from multiple vendors should be good for libraries but progress has been painfully slow. It has yet to have a real impact on the core LMS modules. Even where widely deployed standards do exist and we have a web environment, as in the Opac, progress has not been dramatic. Some libraries are trying



to replace their LMS Opacs by adopting third party products like AquaBrowser or using general purpose discovery tools like Endeca. However, these products are currently another layer built upon the existing LMS Opac. They still need the LMS Opac to deliver functions such as user requests. The user does get an enhanced experience but the library has paid a lot to deliver it. Only when these systems can truly replace core LMS functionality will we see the paradigm shift and costs drop significantly for libraries. This needs a lot of patient and detailed work on standards and a willingness on the part of libraries to take the initiative.

The old-style LMS did at least provide a reliable, modestly functional, system on a plate. In these pioneering days libraries will need much more innovation awareness and many more skills. As my old colleague Richard Wallis recently said about integrating elements of LibraryThing, 'These widgets require you to "Just add a single JavaScript tag, and one tag for every widget you want to display and we do the rest" to the pages that display your Opac, and you too can have Similar Books listings adding interest to your Opac display.' Just add a single JavaScript tag' – I wonder how many library system managers will be comfortable/capable/allowed to do that?<sup>4</sup>

2 See W3C web site <http://www.w3.org/2005/03/Member-Agreement>

3 ExLibris Group web site [www.exlibrisgroup.com/sfx\\_openurl.htm](http://www.exlibrisgroup.com/sfx_openurl.htm)

4 Panlibus blog [http://blogs.talis.com/panlibus/archives/2007/04/librarything\\_in.php](http://blogs.talis.com/panlibus/archives/2007/04/librarything_in.php)

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**Works with organisations such as government, local authorities, schools, colleges and universities, to help make better use of their technology to realise the full potential of their library and information function.**

Phrases like “Web 2.0” (and even now “Web 3.0”), the “semantic web” and “Library 2.0” have become common currency. Innovative business models driven by new, web based technologies have profoundly and permanently changed the way many users interact with the increasingly global world of information. Google and Amazon have redefined the way we search for information and acquire books, digital content and other resources. Libraries in all organisations face stiff competition but have huge potential to deliver new services more effectively and efficiently. Libraries already have significant IT investments that can almost certainly be operated better. In addition, there is a new generation of technologies to be exploited.

## **Why we do it**

We are committed to libraries and want to contribute to their success. We believe the library function is often seriously undervalued. A library can, not only play a larger role in the communities it serves, but also in meeting the strategic goals of its parent organisation.

## **Why use Ken Chad Consulting?**

Few organisations have the expertise or capacity to get to grips with the library automation industry as well as the complex and strategic nature of the wider information industry and the Web.



We provide that additional capacity and expertise to enable service improvement and efficiencies to be gained more quickly and at lower cost. Unlike generic consulting companies we have in-depth experience and understanding of the library and information sector. Combined with a detailed and strategic understanding of the related technologies we can work with you to transform your library and information services while delivering major efficiencies.

## **How we can help**

Virtually all libraries can use IT more effectively and imaginatively. We are well placed to help. We have an unrivalled combination of practical experience in libraries and their parent organisations, together with a sound understanding of information technology and business.

Organisations have their own goals and agendas so we work flexibly, adapting to your requirements.

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