



Maximizing Exposure of Academic Library Collections

Library Collections Need to Evolve

Eighty-seven percent of librarians agree that the range of academic publications has expanded to include much more than traditional professional journals. Libraries, they say, must evolve their collections to include such new media and documentation.

In order to successfully expose such assets and collections as widely as possible, given the current technologically dynamic reality, academic libraries need to adopt the latest discovery tools and digital interfaces. This means embracing holistic asset management and search features that are intuitive enough to motivate both staff and patrons to use them to their full effect. For librarians, such solutions provide full control over showcasing content, collection management, customization of assets in all formats, and integration with their other systems through open standards and APIs. Cutting-edge technology in asset management helps create a comprehensive digital-first resource library, with structured workflows, transparency, a modern interface for greater collaboration, a shallow learning curve, and optimal cost-effectiveness.

But can every library embrace a digital strategy without delay? Are there any hurdles in implementing such asset management solutions? And how should libraries choose the most appropriate system for their goals, budget and needs?

In this white paper, we will attempt to answer these questions through a discussion of the benefits of the latest technologies for academic organizations, their value as part of a digital strategy, and the kinds of features that enhance exposure, stability and support.

The Benefits of the Latest Technologies

Whether starting from scratch or if the library already has several type-specific high-performing platforms, implementing a streamlined, cutting-edge system for centralized management of all library assets is the right investment.

A holistic view

There is a lot of value to be found in centralizing access to all library resources. This includes physical books, electronic resources such as journals or online content, and all digital content owned by the institution (both digitized and born digital, such as video, audio, and image collections).

In a multi-organizational US study, *Assessing the Needs of Public Libraries Toward Advancing the National Digital Platform*, 92% of libraries surveyed had unique and locally significant materials. Newspapers and news clippings were the most common, with 72% of libraries holding these assets, and photographs came in second at 59%. However, other materials noted in this 2017 survey of public and state libraries included "school yearbooks, ship manifests, local church confirmation records and Mardi Gras costumes."¹ Today's libraries have a wide variety of special collections, many of which need special attention, that can be extremely valuable to researchers and students - if they are as easily discoverable as more common resources.

Easier retrieval and availability

The physical limitations of a library are holding today's academic institutions back. In contrast, a unified online system providing a complete view of all library assets has none of the traditional library's physical limitations. It offers around-the-clock availability for users, even from remote locations around the globe. In addition, the same content can be accessed simultaneously by multiple patrons and librarians.

Ease-of-use

According to a 2018 survey of 426 universities, the quality of an institution's digital library significantly affects patron and faculty satisfaction and user loyalty.² A centralized library system can provide patrons fully structured content that paves the way to related information through a single intuitive user interface. In addition, 95% of librarians agree that students today struggle to know what sources to trust, making a single source of truth essential to their education.

For academic institutions, the benefit of a streamlined system is enhanced exposure of the library's content through multiple publishing methods. The library can customize the discovery of its special collections, getting this content in front of more users, many of whom might otherwise never know it exists.³

Data safeguarding

While libraries recognize the risk of non-digitized content being lost or damaged, many mistakenly believe digital resources are completely safe from such eventualities. However, how data is being stored and managed is an equally important consideration in the current technological environment.

Digital content is also at risk of corruption due to technical issues like outdated servers, insufficient backups, or lack of integrity checks regarding the format and content. Without due diligence, such corruption can seriously impact a library over time.

Therefore, the right technology in a centralized system will have consistent and coherent data safeguarding procedures from the outset. Such a system would also include data security and integrity measures once content has been digitized, such as access control, scalability, fail-safes, and availability.

1. Morgan, Kendra, and Merrilee Proffitt. 2017. *Advancing the National Digital Platform: The State of Digitization in US Public and State Libraries*. Dublin, OH: OCLC Research. <https://doi.org/10.25333/C3WK8F>.

2. Factors influencing users' satisfaction and loyalty to digital libraries in Chinese universities, FangXu Jia TinaDub, *Computers in Human Behavior*, Volume 83, June 2018, Pages 64-72.

3. <https://page.exlibrisgroup.com/library-journal-report-download>

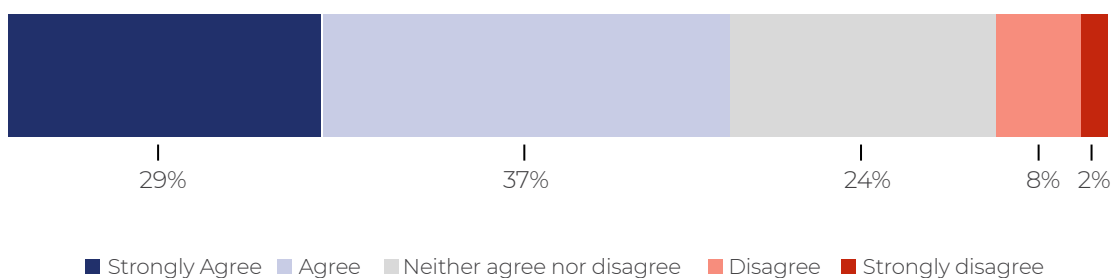
Relieving the burden

In many cases, libraries exist in silos, with staff working in parallel or even sometimes at cross-purposes. A single, centralized system can help avoid duplication of effort and support onboarding new staff with a minimal learning curve.

Staff at two-thirds of academic libraries agree. According to the 2019 State of Academic Libraries Benchmark Survey, they feel that having all databases and other content on a single platform would simplify administration, with 29% in strong agreement.⁴

Figure 8: How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Having all of your library databases and content on one platform would simplify the administration of electronic resources at your library.

All respondents, 2019



A single system also saves on cost, making maintaining a library much easier and more resource effective. This is especially important this era of shrinking academic budgets and general economic downturns.

Ongoing support

As Phil Speigel, VP at LAC Group, comments, “[Digital asset management] systems are living, breathing ecosystems that require ongoing management. The digital archive responsibility is theoretically forever, and even if it’s not used regularly, it must work flawlessly when needed. Further, the technology should be invisible to the user community... [it] needs to be intuitive, simple and effective”.⁵

With one system for the whole library, such dynamic, comprehensive and ongoing support becomes possible. Librarians benefit from efficient, automatic cutting-edge upgrades and feature releases, as well as unified, rapid troubleshooting as needed.

An institution might want to bear this in mind when debating about a commercial solution vs. an open-source solution, the latter often proving less reliable and or stable support.

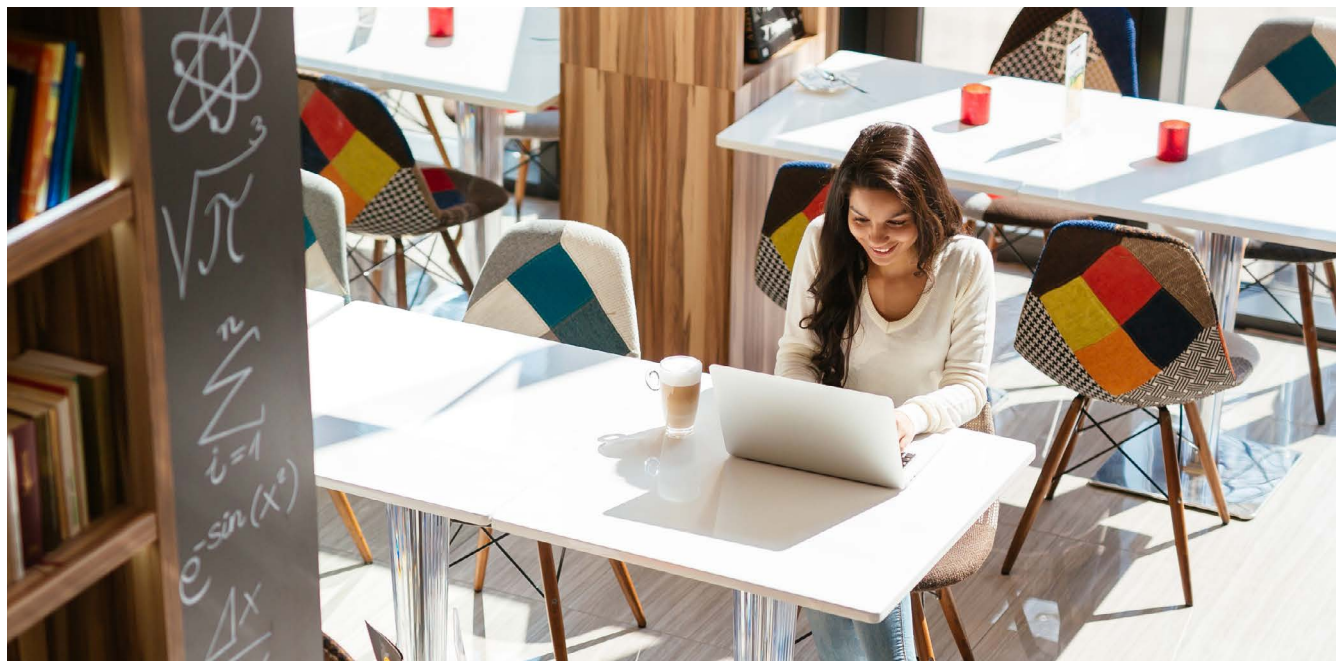
⁴. Library Journal [as above]

⁵. media.lac-group.com/blog/librarians-dam-gods/

Digital Technology is the New Baseline

Today's library patrons and staff are digitally minded, if not fully digital natives, and expect such technology in their interactions with their academic institution. For example, annually, "academic library staff provide instructional sessions (face-to-face as well as electronic) for more than 6.2 million students. Almost 43% of these sessions are digital".⁶

Alongside that medium of communication, various digital media are relevant and expected in the study and research of almost any subject. Alongside traditional text, patrons make use of images, multimedia, art works, and more libraries that offer access to these will be better able to integrate themselves into connected learning environments.



A managed solution

Increasingly, customers want a say in how their products and services are created, maintained and improved, and academic institutions are no different. In fact, 76% of customers say they expect companies to understand their needs and expectations.⁷

The best digital management solutions are able to work specifically for the library adopting them. Such systems are proactive, dynamic and stable, with a solid track record of adapting to an array of environments. They offer continued improvement to their platforms, with such features as monthly upgrades and bug fixes, continuous checks for usage or copyright issues, efficient user support, and an ear for what the customer wants.

Working in partnership to align the management system with the library's ongoing needs is more than a competitive edge. It constitutes a baseline for any successful product, as it also gives libraries of all kinds a real say in the product's development roadmap.

⁶ www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13614533.2019.1575016

⁷ www.salesforce.com/form/pdf/state-of-the-connected-customer-2nd-edition/

Libraries Need to Embrace the Digital Experience

The conclusion is clear: libraries can and should be leveraging a unified deep platform for a complete view of their physical, electronic and digital resources. Such a system can mirror the process of management and discovery for physical books, while providing the value of a fully digital experience.

When done right, both the library and its patrons benefit. For the library, silos are broken down and efficiency, autonomy and data safeguarding practices improve. For the patron, a better customer experience includes quick and straightforward discovery of the content they need, via the channels they use most, and with their unique 21st century needs in mind.

Without an effective and robust digital platform, libraries could be hiding their most valuable content where no one will ever see it

A Digital Technology Checklist for Academic Libraries



Manage digital assets effectively, ensuring they are available and discoverable?



Safeguard your digital files in a proven and secure storage layer?



Actively support you, providing guidance and improvements as you grow?



Value efficiency and maximize resources for both staff and researchers?



Meet the high expectations of public content consumers who expect smart digital?



Follow simple standards and mirror the traditional library process?



About Ex Libris

Ex Libris, a ProQuest company, is a leading global provider of cloud-based solutions for higher education. Alma's Digital Resources solution allows you to consolidate the management of the full range of your library's digital content. Its easy-to-use workflows fully integrate into familiar print and electronic resource management environments, for coherent curation, safeguarding, discovery, and delivery - making your library a one-stop shop for comprehensive knowledge research. Offering SaaS solutions for the management and discovery of the full spectrum of library and scholarly materials, as well as mobile campus solutions driving student engagement and success, Ex Libris serves thousands of customers in 90 countries. Visit www.exlibrisgroup.com