RapidILL: A Sharing Community

A resource sharing revolution of speed, simplicity and savings

RapidILL, designed by librarians for librarians, streamlines and automates interlibrary loan processes, reduces turnaround time, and cuts costs.

As a resource sharing system uniquely built around a community of reciprocal users, RapidILL has an outstanding request fulfillment rate of 95% and an average delivery time of less than 12 hours for digital assets. This is primarily the result of a mutual commitment by every institution in the RapidILL community to 24-hour turnaround times and free-of-charge ILL transactions. The innovative tools, workflows and technology of RapidILL, now part of the Ex Libris family of solutions, make those transactions seamless, transparent and cost-effective for all participating libraries.

Resource Sharing Teams Face Evolving Demands

No library has the ability or budget to own everything, but since the 1960's resource sharing has been key to overcoming this limitation. The digital age has greatly increased its importance, with patrons and academic staff able to identify useful local, national and international resources more easily than ever before.

While libraries worldwide are struggling with shrinking budgets, physical shelf space and staff sizes, they must also constantly adapt to more complex and dynamic processes. Library staff members are spending a significant amount of time on multistep processes to review and fulfill patron requests, including determining how and from whom to request the material. They need to check if the item is held locally, locate potential holding libraries, and review lender policies and prices. Often, there is not even an indication of how quickly a lender can fulfill a given request, which complicates service for end-users and creates uncertainty about its timeliness.

A Resource Sharing Revolution

RapidILL, now part of the Ex Libris family of solutions, resolves those issues with a quiet revolution in resource sharing.

Developed at Colorado State University by interlibrary loan staff and for interlibrary loan staff, RapidILL provides immediate, simplified, and centralized resource request and delivery through a unique community of reciprocal users. Turnaround times are drastically reduced, while the resource sharing process is seamless, transparent, and cost-effective.

Automated and streamlined

Every RapidILL member makes service commitments that include fulfilling or responding to lending requests within 24 hours (Monday-Friday) and providing high-quality scanned material. In practice, however, the average turnaround time through RapidILL is less than 12 hours, significantly better than anything customers experienced before joining the RapidILL community. This is the result of several unique RapidILL features that streamline workflows, ensuring fast turnaround times and high-quality fulfillment.

- As part of RapidILL onboarding, a holdings database is created, with a particular focus on journals. As a result, lending staff only receive requests for material their library owns and can lend, significantly reducing the time often spent today in many libraries handling ILL requests for resources they do not hold.

- To further simplify lending, requests are automatically sent with the call numbers and locations, making it easy to retrieve the right resource.

- From the borrower's perspective, the process is completely automated, with no need for mediation. The RapidILL system instantly verifies that a requested resource is not available at the requesting library, nor via open access, and then identifies the lender best able to provide the material within 24 hours.

Each month, RapidILL automatically collates each member library's resource-sharing statistics, including the number of requests submitted and received, how many were filled, and their turnaround times. Statistics are displayed in table and spreadsheet formats, with granular information down to the article title level. They are also provided in comparison with peer libraries' system average and can be easily accessed at any time.

As the foundation of the RapidILL system, the holdings database supports various activities including local holding matching for local document delivery, and volume-level lender identification for efficient and accurate request routing.

Enhanced collaboration

Centralized and standardized processes facilitate transmissions and request fulfillment among members of RapidILL library groups, even those using different library management platforms. To bridge the gap between borrowers and lenders using different ILL tools for the exchange of journal articles, the solution includes a component called RapidX (at no additional cost) that handles electronic delivery and receipt.

Moreover, for the first time, institutions that have no direct bilateral lending arrangements with one another can share resources on agreed-upon terms thanks to RapidILL. Libraries therefore have access to collections that are broader, deeper and of higher quality than ever before.

A structure of thematically linked libraries ("pods"), and support for prioritization and tiered configurations ensure each library is working most effectively with its partners to enhance consortial and partner resource sharing. This also means greater exposure for library collections, leveraging them for more extensive peer-to-peer sharing and document delivery.

Seamlessly integrated

RapidILL seamlessly integrates into existing library workflows, transparently augmenting ILL management systems and fulfilling requests behind the scenes. Patrons receive their requested material faster, but use the same borrowing and lending management mechanisms they are familiar with (such as ILLiad, Tipasa, RelaisILL, CLIO and Alma).

For the library staff, RapidILL is very simple to learn and use. Training is done in two 60-minute online sessions – one for lending and one for borrowing. In addition, as part of the onboarding and set-up process, the current ILL tools in use are tweaked and a holdings file is created to ensure rapid and seamless workflows.

Reduces library costs

RapidILL's automation, streamlining, and integration make resource sharing more cost-effective than ever before, saving the library money in several ways.

Much of the cost savings can be measured in staff time and resources. Since the RapidILL workflow can be automated on the borrowing side, patron requests can route to partner libraries for fulfillment, and then be delivered to the patron without staff management. After copyright clearance is completed for requested resources, for example, unmediated borrowing requires no further staff intervention for fulfillment. Library personnel are free to handle more complex tasks that add greater value to the institution, such as assisting faculty and students, and developing in-house collections.

Additional savings are realized because there are no transaction charges within the RapidILL network of libraries, nor are there any invoicing costs in the reciprocal system. The standard costs in time and effort of interlibrary fee management and invoicing are slashed drastically.

Spotlight on the community

Alongside the innovative technologies and infrastructure, the RapidILL user community is at the core of the solution's success. Member libraries' mutual commitments to fast, quality responses to sharing requests creates a reciprocity that motivates and benefits all RapidILL partners and their patrons. Librarians know that their connected colleagues are prioritizing their borrowing requests, because they do so as well. As a lender, they can be confident that incoming RapidILL requests are only for resources they have, that the requested asset can be lent out, and that all the information needed to locate and fulfill the request is already provided by RapidILL.

Working with Ex Libris, RapidILL is extending the community of libraries sharing their collections into new global markets and connecting with new customers through Ex Libris engagement platforms (such as the Idea Exchange and the Developer Network). The rapidly expanding RapidILL community also continues to be a source of RapidILL product and service improvements, with a varied and dynamic user base.
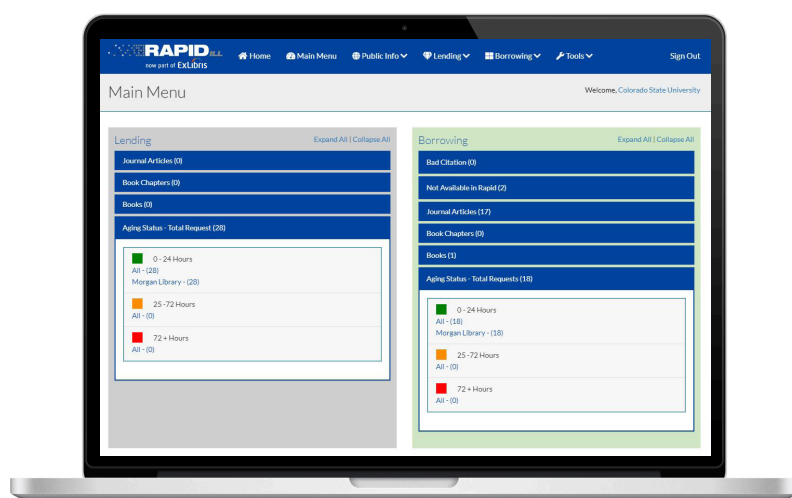
The Tech Behind the Curtain

Enhancing the ability to provide material to patrons rapidly and efficiently across a resource sharing network requires innovative tools, workflows and technology.

Smart request routing –
A unique algorithm utilizes load-leveling and incorporates time zone awareness.

Automated processing –
The workflow software is designed specifically to meet the needs of interlibrary resource sharing.

Unmatched indexing –
The holdings database matches journal requests down to the volume level.

All the essentials -
Information specifically needed for rapid borrowing and lending is maintained in the database.

Voluntary exposure -
The shared database makes it easy to expose only those resources lenders wish to use for fulfillment, while maintaining a comprehensive record of their locally held collections for borrowing.

Full compatibility –
The solution integrates easily with all major interlibrary loan protocols and software packages (including CLIO, ILLiad, RelaisILL, and Tipasa), and provides additional options using ISO and API interactions.

Coherent and consistent –
Resource transmission is seamless among libraries using different ILL platforms, with RapidX handling electronic delivery and receipt of journal articles.
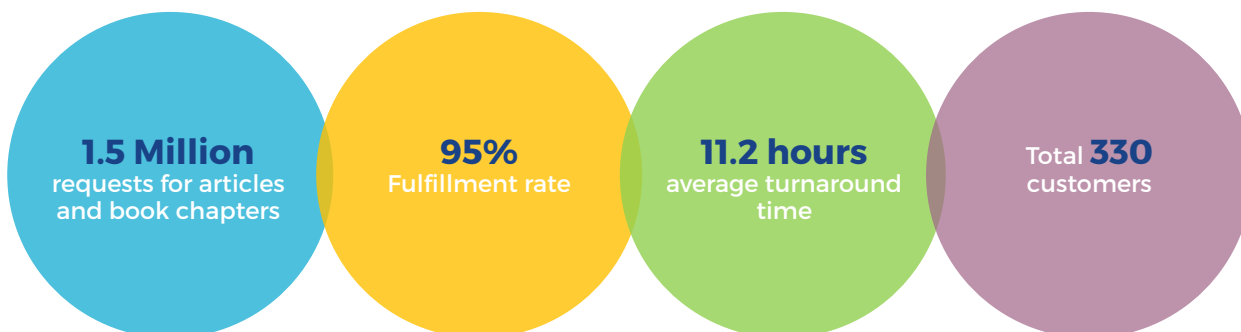
Customer service –
Industry-leading support and the Ex Libris infrastructure, so every library can maintain the highest levels of productivity.

The Global Impact of RapidILL

Participating in the RapidILL community means that you are at the forefront of academic resource sharing, along with many of the world's largest libraries. This collaborative effort, supported by the technology and infrastructure of RapidILL and Ex Libris, will simplify and automate interlibrary loan to meet the demands of the digital age. As libraries increasingly rely on resource sharing, RapidILL is the key to fulfilling the mission of getting information to users anywhere in their communities, which are increasingly global in size.

1.5 Million
requests for articles and book chapters

95%
Fulfillment rate

11.2 hours
average turnaround time

Total **330**
customers

"Having seen the evolution in technology over the past three decades, I can attest that Rapid has produced some of the most ingenious and forward-thinking innovations ever experienced in resource sharing."

Alison Roe O'Grady, Interlibrary Loan Supervisor, Williams College Libraries

About Ex Libris

Ex Libris, a ProQuest company, is a leading global provider of cloud-based solutions for higher education. 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. For more information about Ex Libris, see our website, and join us on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and LinkedIn.