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Electronic Resource Management and the MARC Record: The Road Less Traveled

Paula Sullenger, Auburn University
Reported by Jennifer Duncan

The question of how to track administrative metadata for electronic resources has become a real conundrum for serialists over the past few years. As the number of electronic resources licensed by any given library has grown, we have discovered the need to communicate technical and licensing terms to (among others) the public, the reference librarians, and the Interlibrary Loan office. **Paula Sullenger**, the Serials Acquisitions Librarian (and a former Serials Cataloger) at Auburn University, discussed a relatively new approach to making the licensing terms available: enhancing MARC records.

The decision to enhance MARC records arose from existing cataloging workflow and policy at Auburn. The electronic resources at Auburn were treated just like print resources from the time that the library first started to acquire them: All full-text e-journals (including those supplied by aggregators) received full-level cataloging. By using the 700 fields to describe collection titles (e.g. Online Service: ABI/Inform or Online Service: ACADUNIV), Auburn was able to both generate locally produced E-journal lists and database lists directly from the catalog, as well as to produce statistical reports on the numbers and costs of electronic resources. While this process is very labor intensive, Auburn is fortunate to have a full unit in the cataloging department devoted to this work. Anyone who is managing electronic resources will be familiar with the type of questions that Sullenger found herself perennially answering: Are there access restrictions to this database? What type of access do we have—IP or password? How many simultaneous users are permitted? Are we allowed to provide off-campus access? Are there ILL or e-reserve restrictions? Is the electronic subscription tied to the print? What are the cancellation terms? Are there any archival terms? How can I get usage statistics for this resource? Typically, answers to these types of questions require someone to dig through a paper file. Although some of the information might be available in the acquisitions records, these records generally are not searchable. Sullenger had first created a local relational database for tracking frequently requested information about the electronic resources she was managing. The database was available on Sullenger's hard drive; however, it was desirable to provide reference librarians direct access to this information. She constructed a rudimentary public interface with plans to mount the database on the library's Intranet. The response from Reference was mixed. While they liked the idea of having this information available, they did not like the idea of having to go to a separate database to view it. Their honest assessment was that they probably wouldn't use it unless it could somehow be integrated into a tool with which they were already familiar: the OPAC. At this point, Sullenger brought in the Head of Cataloging, Henry McCurley, to discuss further enhancing the MARC records for electronic resources. Together they determined that because everything else was already being recorded in the record, "this approach would be the one most consistent with our philosophy to keep the catalog the central source of information regarding [Auburn's] resources." Ultimately, they decided that by incorporating this information into the MARC records, the licensing information would be much more easily available to those who needed to view it. After an initial false start with an older version of the Voyager ILS, Sullenger was able to return to this idea in 2002 with the new version of Voyager. To get the project off the ground, she reviewed the fields in the existing local e-resources database and conducted an inventory of e-resource licenses, making certain that she had a record of all relevant information. Jack Fitzpatrick, an IT Specialist in Cataloging at Auburn, established local MARC codes (all information would appear in the 995 and 997 fields). After converting all data to MARC holdings format (approximately 12 fields at this time), she loaded some records into a test database. The response from Reference was enthusiastic. They said that the information would definitely be used and that they would like to see the project expanded. Jack Fitzpatrick also developed a clever way in which the data could be input to the MARC records without having to hand edit them. Fitzpatrick built a "Data Planter," a program that allows Sullenger to enter e-resource management data into the MARC record through a simple web interface. This data then goes into the holdings records of e-resource titles. Similarly, a "Data Reaper" program allows Acquisitions Librarians to pull data from the MARC records in order to run reports on types and numbers of electronic resources, as well as to link acquisitions and payment

information to run financial reports. The librarians at Auburn have found that enhancing MARC works well for them and they are planning to continue to refine this system further. While Sullenger said that she is aware of recent initiatives by vendors such as Innovative to develop electronic resource management modules for their systems, Auburn has concluded that it is still desirable to retain a local rather than an outside system as long as those outside systems require consulting an additional module. The advantage of using MARC is that the information is available both to public services personnel as well as the public. Additionally, while she is aware of trends (the DLF project) to standardize a much more lengthy list of administrative data fields, she has found that the information she has incorporated into Auburn MARC records has so far met all of their needs. She says that the system that she helped to develop is meant to be utilitarian: It answers questions that are currently being asked of her. Her system is flexible and if she begins to see a new trend in the types of questions she receives, she says that she can add fields. In fact, the system continues to undergo development. In the near future, Sullenger says that she will need to decide how to address non-paid resources and how to pull out payment information for titles included as a part of a subset. Additionally, a decision on how and when to incorporate information on individual e-journals still needs to be made, as the initial work has been done only for databases and aggregators. Finally, Sullenger has also begun to consider if it might be desirable or feasible to add statistical use data, which is currently maintained in a separate database. Hopefully, when she figures out this perpetual puzzle, she will share her suggestions in another NASIG workshop.