

Helping You Buy

by | Pamela R. Cibbarelli

This is the fourth in a series of articles published annually by *Computers in Libraries* surveying integrated library systems and services (ILSs). The purpose of the annual survey is to enable comparison of the ILSs that are available.

ILS vendors are in constant pursuit of an ever-changing, consistently vague definition of what the “ideal” library automation system should encompass. The necessity of integrating new developments in computer and telecommunication technologies while concurrently responding to the expanded concepts of what librarians want is extremely challenging.

I have tracked this dance of entrepreneurial grit, the technological advances, and the cleverness of library professionals in expanding the definition of “library services” for 45 years, and it has given me a great appreciation of the offerings of library automation vendors. However, despite paying close attention for all these years, I am still amazed at how responsive the ILS software publishers and service bureaus are. Even more, I am appreciative of the expanding range of services, licensing structures, and delivery systems available today. Today’s offerings are certainly beyond those envisioned 45 years ago when we librarians dreamed of a faster way to produce and interfile catalog cards, or when we squinted as we tried to envision the hyperlinked universe of information that we would access from phone lines and earth-orbiting satellites as described by visionaries such as Tim Berners-Lee and Ted Nelson.

Survey Methodology

A questionnaire was developed based on the surveys conducted by Information Today, Inc. in 2006, 2007, and 2008.

A list of vendors now selling and supporting ILSs was compiled. All vendors were contacted by email requesting that they go to an online survey being conducted by Information Today, Inc. for publication in *Computers in Libraries*. More email and follow-up calls were made as needed.

Only vendors of integrated library systems were included. All data in the article were provided by the ILS vendors.

Survey Purpose

The survey was intended to do the following:

- Provide an up-to-date comparison of functionality currently available in ILS products
- Provide a comparison of support services and licensing structures available from ILS service providers
- Learn the practical advice given by ILS service providers
- Determine the current areas of strong trends and development priorities for ILS services
- Provide vendors’ current contact information for readers interested in more information



ILS

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PART 1: FIVE ISSUES

The survey included the following:

1. Product Platforms and Licensing Structures
2. Search and Resource Management Features
3. Interfaces and Interoperability
4. Library Workflow Functionality
5. Monitoring and Administrative Support

ISSUE 1: Product Platforms and Licensing Structures

This issue delineates the computer operating systems, staff client architectures, remote licensing, and pricing structures. (See Table 1.)

Table 1: Product Platforms, Licensing Structures

Company	Product	Server Operating Systems W=Windows M=Macintosh U=UNIX L=Linux N=Novell T=Thin client	Staff Client Architecture H/W=HTML/web J=Java W=Windows M=Macintosh	Remote Licensing A=ASP C=Cloud H=Hosting S=SaaS n/a=not available	Pricing Structure C=Circulation L=# Locations S=Site license T=Type of library U=Concurrent users V=Volumes
Auto-Graphics	AGent VERSO	W	H/W	S	V
BiblioMondo	Portfolio	W,M,U,L,N,T	H/W,J,W,M	S	U,S
Book Systems	Atrium	W,L	H/W	A	L,S,T
ByWater Solutions	Koha	W,M,U,L	H/W	C	V
Civica/CMi	Spydus	W	W	S	C
COMPanion Corp.	Alexandria	W,M,T	H/W,J,W,M	A	L,S
Cuadra Associates	STAR Knowledge Center	W,U,L	H/W	H	U
Cuadra Associates	STAR/Libraries	W,U,L	H/W	H	U
CyberTools	CyberTools for Libraries	W,M,U,L,T	H/W,J	C	U
EOS International	EOS.Web	W	H/W,W	S	U,S
Equinox Software	Evergreen	L	W,M	H	V,L
Ex Libris	Aleph 500	U,L	W	A	U,S
Ex Libris	Voyager	U,L	W	H	V,U,S
Follett Software	Destiny Library Manager	W	H/W,W	A	V,L,S
Infor	V-smart	W,U,L	W	A	S
Infor	Vubis Smart	W,U,L	H/W	A	S
Infovision Software	Amlib	W,M,U,L,N,T	H/W,W	S	C
Inmagic	Genie	W	H/W,W	H	L,U,S
Inmagic	Presto for Social Libraries	W	H/W	A,H,S	L,U,S
Innovative Interfaces	Millennium	W,M,U,L	H/W,J,W,M	A	V,U,S,C
Keystone Systems	KLAS	W,U,L,T	H/W,W	S	L,U,T
LibLime	LibLime Enterprise Koha	L	H/W	C	V,T
Library Concepts	CONCEPT I	W	W	A	U
LibraryWorld	LibraryWorld	M,U	H/W	S	L,S
Mandarin	Oasis	W,M,T	H/W,W,M	A	S
MINISIS	M2L - MINISIS	W,T	H/W,W	S	U
New Generation	LIBRARYSOFT	W	H/W,W,M	H	V
OCLC	Amlib	W,T	W	n/a	U
Open Text Corp.	Open Text Library Mgmt	W,U,L	H/W,J	H	U,S
Polaris	Polaris ILS	W,N,T	W	H,S	V,L,U,S,C
SirsiDynix	SirsiDynix Symphony	W,U,L,N,T	H/W,J,W,M	n/a	V,L,C,T
Softlink	Liberty	W	H/W	S	U
Softlink	Oliver	W	H/W	S	S
Surpass	Surpass Centriva	W	H/W,W	A	L,T
SydneyPLUS	SydneyPLUS	W,U,N,T	H/W,W	S	V,L,U,S,C,T
The Library Corp.	CARL.X	U,L	H/W,W	A	V,L,S,C
The Library Corp.	Library•Solution	W,L	W	A	V,L,S
VTLS	Virtua	U,L,T	W	C	U

ISSUE 2: Search and Resource Management Features

Enhanced search capabilities in ILS products have been the focus of rapid development by vendors. (See Table 2.) The web has made all librarians eager for fuller, more integrated search results. The era of a librarian going to multiple indexes or databases to complete a single search and then having to remove duplicates is fading. Just as Google can provide us with documents, maps, and images in a single search, libraries are heading toward more comprehensive search results.

Cross-database (federated) searching, interoperability with electronic records management systems, and the integration of institutional repositories are being provided by many of the ILS vendors.

Table 2: Search and Resource Management Features

Y=Yes with own ERM only O=Yes with interface to others' ERM n/a=ERM not available	Cross-Database Searching	ERM Interoperability	Institutional Repository Integration	Open URL Link Resolution	Supports Metasearch	Reference Tracking	URL Checking
Yes	Y	Yes	Yes	C,S	No	Yes	
Yes	O	Yes	Yes	C,S	Yes	Yes	
Yes	Y	No	Yes	S	No	No	
Yes	O	No	Yes	C,S	No	No	
Yes	Y	Yes	Yes	S	Yes	Yes	
Yes	O	Yes	Yes	C,S	Yes	Yes	
No	Y	Yes	No	n/a	Yes	No	
No	Y	Yes	No	n/a	Yes	No	
No	Y	Yes	Yes	C,S	No	Yes	
Yes	Y	No	Yes	C,S	Yes	Yes	
No	n/a	No	No	n/a	No	No	
Yes	Y	Yes	Yes	S	No	Yes	
Yes	Y	Yes	Yes	S	Yes	Yes	
Yes	O	Yes	Yes	C,S	Yes	Yes	
Yes	O	Yes	Yes	S	Yes	Yes	
Yes	O	Yes	No	C,S	Yes	Yes	
Yes	O	Yes	No	C,S	Yes	Yes	
Yes	Y	Yes	Yes	C,S	Yes	Yes	
No	Y	No	No	n/a	No	No	
No	O	No	No	C	No	No	
No	n/a	No	No	n/a	No	No	
No	O	No	Yes	n/a	Yes	No	
No	Y	No	Yes	n/a	Yes	No	
Yes	Y	Yes	No	C,S	Yes	No	
No	n/a	No	No	C	Yes	Yes	
Yes	n/a	No	No	n/a	No	No	
Yes	n/a	Yes	No	S	No	Yes	
Yes	O	No	Yes	C,S	No	Yes	
Yes	O	Yes	Yes	C,S	No	Yes	
Yes	O	Yes	No	C,S	Yes	No	
Yes	O	Yes	No	C,S	Yes	No	
Yes	O	No	No	n/a	No	No	
Yes	O	No	Yes	C	Yes	Yes	
Yes	O	No	Yes	C,S	Yes	Yes	
Yes	O	No	Yes	C,S	Yes	Yes	
Yes	O	Yes	Yes	S	Yes	Yes	

Open URL link resolution and URL checking have improved the search process. Reference tracking is another improvement in ILSs.

ERM (electronic resources management) is the most changed area of the survey compared to the responses provided by ILS vendors in previous years. This is also reflected in comments made by ILS vendors regarding where the action is this year. There is a 27% increase in the number of ILS vendors providing ERM interoperability.

ISSUE 3: Interfaces and Interoperability

Thanks to the web and graphical user interfaces, library systems are now much more interesting than those text-only displays emulating catalog cards that we once thought were the epitome of technology. (See Table 3.)

Patron submittal of book reviews, a concept introduced commercially by Amazon.com, has become popular. Eighty-five percent of ILSs provide this feature.

RFID (radio frequency identification) tags permit radio-frequency transfer of identification numbers for library mate-

rials. This is a great feature to help take inventory of collections and to speed check-in and checkout. More than 80% of the systems represented in this survey now accept RFID input.

OCLC profoundly changed the way librarians catalog materials and manage interlibrary loan. Today, most library vendors provide an interface to upload and download MARC records from OCLC or other bibliographic utilities. The exceptions are Auto-Graphics, which manages its own MARC database, and Surpass Software, which focuses heavily on church library management and many other small libraries.

Interfaces to book vendors are also becoming increasingly popular. This saves library staff the necessity of redundant data entry.

Another feature most of us first saw on Amazon is the display of book images. Today, this has become a commonplace offering; all but one ILS vendor include the display of book excerpts, jacket images, or tables of contents in the online catalog. Eighty percent of ILSs provide all three of these features.

Expanding the types of library resources discoverable in the library catalog is vastly improved by ILS vendors providing

Table 3: Interfaces and Interoperability

Company	Product	Y=own product O=others product n/a=not available	Children's Catalog	Patron's Book Reviews	RFID Tags	Bibliographic Utilities	Book Vendors	Digital Content	Book Images	Ebooks	Internet-Based Commercial Databases	Mobile or Handheld Devices	Public PC Mgmt Systems	Self-Checkout Stations	Serials Distributors
Auto-Graphics	AGent VERSO	Y	Yes	No	No	Yes	j,t,p,h,d,e,txt	E,J,T	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
BiblioMondo	Portfolio	Y	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	j,t,p,h,d,e,txt	E,J,T	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Book Systems	Atrium	Y	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	j,t,p,h,d,e,txt	E,J,T	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
ByWater Solutions	Koha	Y	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	j,t,p,h,d,e,txt	E,J,T	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Civica/CMI	Spydus	Y	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	j,t,p,h,d,e,txt	E,J,T	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
COMPanion Corp.	Alexandria	Y	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	j,t,p,h,d,e,txt	E,J,T	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cuadra Associates	STAR Knowledge Center	n/a	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	j,t,p,h,d,e,txt	n/a	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cuadra Associates	STAR/Libraries	n/a	No	No	Yes	No	j,t,p,h,d,e,txt	T	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
CyberTools	CyberTools for Libraries	n/a	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	j,t,p,h,d,e,txt	E,J,T	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
EOS International	EOS.Web	O	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	j,t,p,h,d,e,txt	E,J,T	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Equinox Software	Evergreen	n/a	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	n/a	E,J,T	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Ex Libris	Aleph 500	Y	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	j,t,p,h,d	E,J,T	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ex Libris	Voyager	n/a	No	No	Yes	Yes	j,p,h,d	E,J,T	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Follett Software	Destiny Library Manager	Y	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	j,t,p,h,d,e,txt	E,J,T	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes
Infor	V-smart	n/a	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	j,t,p,h,d,e,txt	E,J,T	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Infor	Vubis Smart	n/a	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	j,t,p,h,d,e,txt	E,J,T	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Infovision Software	AmLib	Y	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	j,t,p,h,d,e,txt	J	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Inmagic	Genie	O	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	j,t,p,h,d,e,txt	J,T	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Inmagic	Presto for Social Libraries	O	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	j,t,p,h,d,e,txt	J,T	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Innovative Interfaces	Millennium	Y	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	j,t,p,h,d,e,txt	E,J,T	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Keystone Systems	KLAS	O	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	j,t,p,h,d,e,txt	E,J,T	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
LibLime	LibLime Enterprise Koha	O	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	j,t,p,h,d,e,txt	E,J,T	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Library Concepts	CONCEPT I	Y	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	j,p,h,txt	E,J,T	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
LibraryWorld	LibraryWorld	n/a	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	j,d,txt	J	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Mandarin	Oasis	Y	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	j,t,p,h,d,e,txt	E,J,T	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
MINISIS	M2L - MINISIS	Y	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	j,t,p,h,d,e,txt	E,J,T	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
New Generation	LIBRARYSOFT	Y	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	j,t,p,h,d,e,txt	E,J,T	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
OCLC	AmLib	Y	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	j,t,p,h,d,e,txt	E,J,T	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Open Text Corp.	Open Text Library Mgmt	n/a	No	Yes	Yes	No	j,t,p,h,d,e,txt	E,J,T	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Polaris	Polaris ILS	Y	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	j,t,p,h,d,e,txt	E,J,T	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
SirsiDynix	SirsiDynix Symphony	Y	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	j,t,p,h,d,e,txt	E,J,T	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Softlink	Liberty	Y	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	j,t,p,h,d,e,txt	E,J,T	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Softlink	Oliver	Y	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	j,t,p,h,d,e,txt	E,J,T	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Surpass	Surpass Centiva	Y	Yes	Yes	No	No	j,t,p,h,d,e,txt	E,J,T	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
SydneyPLUS	SydneyPLUS	Y	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	j,t,p,h,d,e,txt	E,J,T	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
The Library Corp.	CARL X	Y	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	j,t,p,h,d,e,txt	E,J,T	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
The Library Corp.	Library•Solution	Y	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	j,t,p,h,d,e,txt	E,J,T	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
VTLS	Virtua	Y	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	j,t,p,h,d,e,txt	E,J,T	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

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interfaces to data in a wide range of digital formats. All but five of the vendors surveyed now can import data in JPEG, TIFF, PDF, HTML, DOC, XLS (Excel), and text formats.

Searching internet resources, both free and for-fee, is possible in most of the ILSs. Patron authentication, which is important to this process, is another item included in the survey. With this year's survey, 100% of the respondents indicate they now offer searching internet resources. All but one will search for-fee internet databases. These two items are no longer included in the spreadsheets. Patron authentication, which is now available in 100% of the ILSs, is also eliminated from the spreadsheets since these items no longer show differentiation among the systems.

Public PC management has been integrated into 60% of ILSs. This permits individuals to sign up for use of a public PC from the library catalog without staff involvement.

Children's catalog interfaces were a rage in the 1990s among public and school librarians. Many vendors licensed the use of interface software provided by CARL Systems. Today, almost all the vendors who sell to public and school libraries provide a children's catalog interface. Most of them have written their own applications rather than licensing software from a third-party vendor.

Ebooks were mentioned by several ILS vendors as one of the current features that are "hot." The survey results concur. Ninety-two percent of ILS vendors now have interfaces to ebooks.

Interfaces to handheld devices such as BlackBerries and iPhones are also available. Seventy percent of vendors are now offering these features. In describing Atrium, Bart Eby, national sales manager for Book Systems, Inc., explained, "Unlike other systems that offer only WebOPAC interfaces, the entire system is accessible from any computer or mobile device using their existing browser."

Table 4: Library Workflow Functions Supported

Table with columns for Company, Product, and various workflow functions: Acquisitions, Authority Control, Automated Maths Handling, Inventory Mgmt, Local History, Media Booking, Reserve Desk, Serials, Serials Routing.

Table 5: Monitoring and Administrative Support

Table with columns for Company, Product, and administrative support features: T=Telephone, E=Email, W=Website, C=Chat, S=Site visits, Y=Yes, N=No, U=Users group, O=Online forum, L=List-serv, n/a=not available, Y=Yes, N=No, E=excel, P=pdf, D=doc, H=html, E=Email, T=Telephone, P=Print, R=RSS.

ISSUE 4: Library Workflow Functionality

The core functions of integrated library systems have been accomplished by all the vendors that responded to the survey. These include functionality for an online catalog, a circulation control system, prepackaged reports, and holds management. All of the ILSs accept MARC-formatted records and provide tools for adding, editing, and deleting records. (See Table 4.)

Most ILS vendors also provide acquisitions (89%), authority control (94%), automated materials handling (86%), inventory management (92%), local history (86%), media booking (78%), reserve desk (89%), serials (92%), and serials routing (89%). The fact that a particular function is available, however, does not necessarily mean it should be considered a requirement. Some libraries simply do not need some of these functions. Library Concepts, Surpass Software, Keystone, and Open Text are all products that are designed to appeal to libraries with special requirements.

MARC formatting of records has been a library standard for so long that many assume all ILSs will output MARC records as well as accept them as input. However, as Lori A. Roux, VP operations at CyberTools, Inc. (CyberTools for Libraries), comments, "We're still startled that we're doing conversions in 2009 from big expensive systems that don't understand authority management and don't take care of basic data integrity. ILS purchasers continue to tolerate fundamental weaknesses in big-ticket systems."

ISSUE 5: Monitoring and Administrative Support

In the next portion of the survey, more differentiation is found among the vendors as they respond to queries about the monitoring and administrative support available. (See Table 5.)

All vendors provide support by telephone, email, and website. The differentiation comes with those vendors that provide support via internet chat or site visits.

Seventy-five percent of the vendors provide decision support services.

Vendors were asked to indicate if they support their user community with users' groups, a listserv, or an online forum. One-third of the vendors indicated they provide all three of these group communication methodologies. Eighty percent have users' groups, which is the most popular of these methodologies.

Almost all the ILS vendors (94%) can measure in-house usage statistics.

The formats in which information can be output from the ILSs are not as limiting as they were in the past. Today, vendors offer XLS, DOC, PDF, and HTML formats in varying combinations.

Patron account self-services features, patron authentication, and prepackaged reports have now become so common in ILSs that they have been deleted from the tables this year since they no longer contribute to differentiation among the ILSs.

Email delivery of patron notices is provided by all the vendors. Telephone notification, on the other hand, is provided by only a few. RSS is an option for only 25% of the systems.

PART 2: FIVE QUESTIONS

There were also five open-ended questions asked of the vendors that were intended to help our readers buy the system that is best for them:

1. Where's the action? What component, feature, or function is most in demand this year?
2. Do you have plans to incorporate SaaS (software-as-a-service) or cloud computing technology in your ILSs?
3. Are you planning to develop apps for your library customers to provide access for their patrons' information via the iPhone, the BlackBerry, etc.?
4. What is the most important thing librarians should consider when evaluating an ILS?
5. What do you regard as your products' greatest strength?

QUESTION 1: Where's the action? What component, feature, or function is most in demand this year?

ILS vendors' responses focused on the management of expanded library resources, especially electronic resources management (ERM), expanded communication, Web 2.0, and SaaS.

- Discovery platforms
- iPhone access and other mobile services
- Digital repositories
- Electronic resources management (ERM)
- Web 2.0, including tagging, metadata, RSS, rating services, and patron reviews
- Software as a service (SaaS)

Darren Dibb, vice president of sales for COMPanion Corp. (Alexandria), notes,

"What I've seen as a continuous trend is that customers are looking for an ILS that is flexible enough to be a hub for access to all subscription-based and free information databases. Also, the ability to integrate with ebooks is a trend. Everyone is looking for a better way to manage the ebook world."

Carol Knoblauch, product manager for Open Text Corp. (Open Text Library Management), describes OPAC 2.0, which has

"new features to provide alternate relevance and navigation models including faceted navigation and result set clustering. Concept mining helps the catalogers by analyzing content (e.g., document text) and extracting keywords/phrases, company, and personal names."

QUESTION 2: Do you have plans to incorporate SaaS or cloud computing technology in your ILSs?

ILS vendors were asked if they have plans to offer ASP, SaaS, hosting, or cloud computing for their systems. These are alternative licensing models that imply the location of the computing equipment on which the library databases reside and the levels of scalability of the systems.

A couple of ILS vendors admitted hesitation, including Glenn McEowen, VP development and sales of Library Concepts (CONCEPT I), who says, "Not immediately, though it is under consideration."

Bob Molyneux, VP, business development for Equinox Software, Inc. (Evergreen), sounds even more cautious: "Cloud computing may well be the wave of the future, but there have been enough very public failures with data lost that we are not thinking about it right now. We believe in robust solutions and we think cloud computing is not quite ready for prime time. For now, we offer SaaS (ASP)."

However, these opinions were in the minority. The majority of ILS vendors are currently offering these alternatives or planning to do so soon. Many responses echoed Robert Pillow, director, marketing and sales for VTLS, Inc. (Virtua), who says, "VTLS has long offered both hosting and SaaS services to its customers, and today, VTLS also offers cloud computing environments for traditional integrated library systems and digital repositories."

QUESTION 3: Are you planning to develop apps for your library customers to provide access for their patrons' information via the iPhone, the BlackBerry, etc.?

Handheld personal devices such as BlackBerries and iPhones are attracting the attention of many agencies that are eager to have their apps at the fingertips of every user. Librarians are no exception. Software publishers and vendors are eager to help accommodate them.

Bart Eby, national sales manager for Book Systems, Inc. (Atrium), points out,

"Since Atrium is an entirely browser-based ILS, devices like the iPhone or a BlackBerry can already be used to access Atrium by utilizing their existing built-in browsers."

Albert Flores, VP sales for Auto-Graphics, says,

"Efforts in the development of rich internet application (RIA) user interfaces are directly related to support for mobile devices."

QUESTION 4: What is the most important thing librarians should consider when evaluating an ILS?

Through the years, librarians have learned their selection of library automation systems is really the selection of a company with which they are entering a long-term relationship. The lucky ones have selected vendors who are still in the marketplace. They are the librarians who have access to software that has evolved with technological advancements and have grown from incorporating the good ideas of other librarians using the software.

Other librarians have seen their integrated library systems vendors go out of business or merge with former competitors,

only to have their software supported for a brief period and then dropped, leaving those librarians with stagnant ILSs. In those situations, usually no one is writing new code or fixing bugs.

Changing an ILS is not done lightly. It involves convincing management to provide funds, writing RFPs, evaluating proposals, attending demonstrations, negotiating contracts, converting files, cleaning up databases, installing hardware, and retraining staff and library customers. Making a good selection makes good business sense.

ILS vendors' insights into what is most important when evaluating a system are very helpful.

- A vendor's feature set should match the library's specific needs.
- Match the library's requirements with a vendor's strengths.
- Look at ILSs that use open source SQL database and web-server applications.
- Make sure the ILS has a reputation for exceptional customer service.
- Try to determine the future vision of a vendor to make sure it will support the library's system in the long term.
- Ascertain whether an ILS company is in full compliance with established standards.
- Confirm that the product can be altered to meet local needs.
- Look at a vendor's customer base to determine how the product works in settings similar to your own.
- Look for a company that understands your business and views itself as your partner.

According to **Chris McPhee**, director of marketing of Softlink International (Liberty and Oliver),

"The evaluation of an ILS should also take into account the ILS vendor: its stability, industry experience, services available to support the ILS and users, in addition to software functionality and openness to integration. A clear product road map, flexible functionality, and comprehensive support from an experienced software partner are all critical elements to a library solution that brings positive returns to the library or organization in the long term."

Lorrie Ann Butler, director of product strategy and customer relations for The Library Corp. (CARLX), says,

"Look at the vendor's customer base and determine if these libraries match your own in terms of service levels, staffing resources, and public demand. See a demo. Visit libraries like your own."

A bonus directory of vendors is free on our website.

<http://infotoday.com/cilmag>

Pamela R. Cibbarelli is now retired and traveling as a full-time RV-er with her husband, Tony Jones, and their beagle, Jones. She previously was editor of The Directory of Library Automation Software, Systems, and Services, chairperson of the annual IOLS Meetings held in New York, and a frequent contributor to Computers in Libraries, Information Today, and Special Libraries.

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Author: Cibbarelli, Pamela R.

Title: Helping You Buy ILS

Source: Comput Libr 30 no1 Ja/F 2010 p. 20-3, 46-8

ISSN: 1041-7915

Publisher: Information Today, Inc.

143 Old Marlton Pike, Medford, NJ 08055-8750

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