SirsiDynix:
A Study of the Integrated Library System Company

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Abstract

This is a study and review of the integrated library system (ILS) company SirsiDynix. A variety of sources were consulted: the company’s website (www.sirsidynix.com), the ILS administrator of a library consortium, and various peer-reviewed and news articles. The study includes a brief history of the company and a review of all its products, modules, and services. There is also a discussion on how customers have responded to its products.
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SirsiDynix is one of the most widely used integrated library system (ILS) vendors in American public libraries. The company has been in existence in some form since 1979. The public libraries of New Castle County in Delaware operate with the SirsiDynix ILS. The New Castle County branches are included in a consortium of thirty-four Delaware public libraries, all of which—plus two bookmobiles—use the same SirsiDynix ILS (D. Colose, personal communication, March 6, 2014). Diann Colose, System Administrator at the Delaware Division of Libraries, was interviewed on the administration perspective of using SirsiDynix for a consortium of public libraries. Colose is the lead decision maker on ILS in Delaware. The purpose of this study is to provide background information and review the services provided by SirsiDynix.

History

SirsiDynix is the result of the 2005 merger of its two parent companies, Dynix and Sirsi. Dynix Systems, Inc., was founded in 1983 and developed a number of automated library systems throughout its complicated business evolution, including the ILS called Horizon (Breeding, 2004, p. 24). Horizon was the system used by the libraries in one of the three counties in Delaware at the time of the merger, and it is still a product supported by SirsiDynix today. Sirsi Corporation was founded in 1979, and the number of the company’s ILSs in use grew in its early years, making it “one of the most dominant forces in the industry” (Breeding, 2004, p. 42). Sirsi’s main ILS was Unicorn, which was used by the libraries in the other two counties in Delaware in 2005. In June of 2005, Sirsi and Dynix announced that they would merge their companies, with Sirsi retaining the greatest amount of influence in terms of investors and board
members (Rogers, 2005, p. 25). Delaware chose to use this merger as an opportunity to combine all the Delaware libraries under one ILS; they switched from Dynix’s Horizon and Sirsi’s Unicorn and came together under the new SirsiDynix product Symphony. Symphony is the ILS still used by Delaware libraries today (D. Colose, personal communication, March 6, 2014).

According to Breeding, SirsiDynix continues to be “one of the largest companies developing software and services for libraries” (2014, p. 45). The latest change of hands for the company occurred in January of 2007, when SirsiDynix was bought by the investment company Vista Equity Partners (Vista Equity Partners, 2014). SirsiDynix’s most recent acquisition was of Electronic Online Systems International, better known as EOS International, in November of 2013 (Breeding, 2013).

**Libraries**

SirsiDynix is used by thousands of libraries in America as well as overseas. Today SirsiDynix reaches more than 23,000 libraries in over 70 countries, according to their webpage (SirsiDynix, 2013c). While the main headquarters are in Utah, there are also offices in Canada, Chile, France, the United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Australia, Taiwan, and China (SirsiDynix, 2013d). Its products can be useful in any type of library: public, academic, K-12 school, or special. According to a 2009 report on the company, “it’s customers run the gamut of large research libraries to small public libraries,” compelling it to “provide powerful flexible tools to its larger customers,” while “delivering fully managed self-contained systems for others” (“Vendors and Products,” p. 31). It also accommodates consortia by allowing each library in the consortium to set its own policies, conveniently allowing “public libraries to have one set of rules and the academics to have a completely different set” (D. Colose, personal communication, March 6, 2014). The SirsiDynix catalogs explored in this study
were those of the New Castle County Libraries in Delaware, Whitefish Community Library and Flathead County Libraries in Montana, and Spokane Public Libraries in Washington. These libraries were selected because they are all libraries I have used regularly in the past and present.

**Products**

SirsiDynix offers a wide variety of proprietary products to accommodate the needs of any type of library. This section discusses four types of integrated library systems, seven types of patron discovery systems, and eight types of management and productivity products available through SirsiDynix.

**Integrated Library Systems**

Current SirsiDynix customers run one of four different ILS products: Unicorn, Horizon, Symphony, and BLUEcloud Suite.

**Unicorn and Horizon.** Unicorn is an older ILS originally created by Sirsi; it is no longer supported by SirsiDynix. Instead, SirsiDynix encourages libraries still using Unicorn to upgrade to the newer Symphony ILS, with free support (SirsiDynix, 2013l). Horizon was the main ILS product provided by Dynix before 2005, and at the time of the merger, the new company originally announced that it would no longer support Horizon (D. Colose, personal communication, March 6, 2014). However, SirsiDynix is still developing Horizon today, and according to their website “has no plans to discontinue support” (SirsiDynix, 2013h). Of the four library catalogs surveyed, one uses the Horizon ILS and three use Symphony, which according to the SirsiDynix website utilizes “the best of breed capabilities from Horizon along with exciting new features inspired by technology trends and customer feedback” (SirsiDynix, 2013h).

**Symphony.** Symphony was launched in 2007, shortly after the merger of Sirsi and Dynix. Khurshid and Al-Baridi explain that “following the merger, SirsiDynix did not find it
feasible to continue to develop and maintain two large systems” (2009, p. 8). And so Symphony was presented as SirsiDynix’s consolidated ILS platform. It was built based on Unicorn and is therefore the upgraded version of the Unicorn ILS. The SirsiDynix website advertizes Symphony’s excellent efficiency, flexibility, security, and support (SirsiDynix, 2013k).

**BLUEcloud Suite.** The BLUEcloud Suite is SirsiDynix’s newest product—or rather, set of products—released in the summer of 2013 (Kelley, 2013). It runs on a library’s existing Horizon or Symphony ILS and provides many brand-new features. Some of the new elements of BLUEcloud are MobilCirc; Universal Admin, which allows staff the ability to configure all tools using only one interface; eResource Central; Global Vendor Access, which allows libraries to store vendor information on the cloud; Global Title List, which can display content to end users that the library does not yet have; and BLUEcloud PAC, a new and streamlined patron discovery product. SirsiDynix CEO Bill Davison asserts that the greatest thing about BLUEcloud is that it provides a new ILS platform without requiring any migration, and all the new products are included in the existing maintenance fee, at no additional cost (Davison, 2013).

**Patron Discovery**

The three main patron interfaces for SirsiDynix ILSs are e-Library, Enterprise, and Portfolio. BLUEcloud PAC is the newest addition to their discovery products.

**E-Library.** E-Library is the older interface that works with Symphony. This interface allows users to conduct basic and advanced searches, gives patrons access to their account with the ability to view charged items and holds and to renew items. Library staff also has the capability of creating various links in the catalog. Some links found in the catalogs surveyed were Library Information, Bestsellers, and Recommended Reading. The catalogs surveyed that
used e-Library were New Castle County Libraries (SirsiDynix, 2014a), Flathead County Libraries (SirsiDynix, 2014c), and Whitefish Community Library (SirsiDynix, 2014d).

**Enterprise.** Enterprise is the upgraded version of e-Library. The SirsiDynix website urges customers, “For the next level of dynamic discovery, turn to SirsiDynix Enterprise: faceted, federated powerful search” (SirsiDynix, 2013f). Enterprise offers even greater searching capability than e-Library by allowing results to “populate in ‘rooms’ based on content categories or themes” (SirsiDynix, 2013g). It also gives users the ability to narrow searches by various limiters. The library catalog surveyed that used Enterprise was that of the New Castle County Libraries (SirsiDynix, 2014b). Delaware public libraries have chosen to purchase Enterprise while also continuing to offer use of the classic e-Library. Colose indicated that patrons have been enjoying the added functions that Enterprise offers, and its use of “fuzzy logic” allows patrons to get the best possible search results (personal communication, March 6, 2014).

**Portfolio and BLUEcloud PAC.** SirsiDynix Portfolio is a different discovery interface that specializes in digital asset management. Its main focus is on digitizing and organizing information for patron use, such as historical newspapers and photographs (SirsiDynix, 2013j). The BLUEcloud PAC is part of the BLUEcloud Suite ILS. It is offered for any library not using Portfolio or Enterprise.

**Other patron products.** Several other patron discovery interfaces are available from SirsiDynix. BookMyne is a mobile app that can be downloaded onto patron devices to provide mobile access to the catalog. At the time that Delaware libraries were looking into catalog apps, they opted to hire Boopsie, a third-party vendor, to create an app because they offered more features than BookMyne. However, according to Colose, the two are almost “on par” now (personal communication, March 6, 2014). SirsiDynix’s Social Library is a Facebook application
connected to the library’s Facebook page that functions as a virtual branch, including a full-access catalog. EResource Central (eRC), mentioned earlier as part of the BLUEcloud Suite, allows access to electronic resources through the catalog.

**Management and Productivity**

In addition to ILS and patron discovery interfaces, SirsiDynix offers a number of products that assist libraries with productivity and management. Their application programming interface (API) and Web Services allows programming control of various aspects of ILS, such as “being able to respond to the preferences, interests and needs that are specific to [patrons]” (SirsiDynix, 2013b). Another management product offered is Directors Station, which allows library directors a “unique, customized view of [the] institution’s activities and operations” (SirsiDynix, 2013e). MobilCirc, an add-on recently purchased by Delaware public libraries and also a part of the BLUEcloud Suite, is a mobile app that has a touch screen interface. This useful product allows librarians to use circulation and inventory programs anywhere in the library, and it can even work with Bluetooth scanners. Web Reporter and StaffWeb are add-ons that allow standard functions through web-based access, the former having the ability to run reports and the latter allowing various staff functions. Voice Automation works in conjunction with a library’s telephones, playing an option menu for incoming calls and automating outgoing calls for such things as overdue notices. ERes is an electronic reserves system, and PocketCirc is a handheld scanning device. Self-service stations and print management tools are some other productivity products.
Modules and Services

Modules

The modules that are available to different staff members can be set according to an individual’s login. This capability is offered through a client interface called WorkFlows. A circulation staff member can access six modules: Circulation, Offline, Reports, Requests, Serial Control, and Utility. Under other library staff logins, nine additional modules are available: Acquisitions, Calendar, Cataloging, Configuration, Hyperion, ILL, Outreach, Reserves, and Selection (D. Colose, personal communication, March 6, 2014).

Technical and Customer Support

The SirsiDynix Support Center is comprised of trained support specialists who are available to clients worldwide. There is a separate member-access Support Center website, and support team members are available 24/7 for critical support on system outages. In addition, every SirsiDynix customer is assigned a Library Relations Manager, whose job it is to work with the library to make sure that “they are leveraging their technology to its fullest potential and they are aware of every opportunity available to learn, share and contribute” (SirsiDynix, 2013i).

Services

SirsiDynix also offers many service packages to its users. Data Services assists with converting, updating, and maintaining resources. Education Services provides eLearning courses that assist in training library staff on upgrades and new purchases. The various Consulting Services packages provide extra technology support beyond what the Support Center can give. The Implementation Services assist libraries implement newly purchased SirsiDynix products (SirsiDynix, 2013b).
Aside from these specific services, SirsiDynix keeps a blog on their website written by company staff in order to keep customers up-to-date on news. They also provide a number of webinars and conferences across the world. SirsiDynix customers in North America can participate in the user group COSUGI (Customers of SirsiDynix User Group, Inc.); there are other user groups for different regions around the world.

**Comparisons and Reviews**

Despite being one of the largest ILS vendors, SirsiDynix is not necessarily the highest rated. Data collection from a 2011 study of various ILS vendors in public and academic libraries shows that other vendors bring greater customer satisfaction than SirsiDynix’s Symphony and Horizon. These two systems ranked the lowest average ratings for the question, “How satisfied is the library with your current Integrated Library System (ILS)?” (Breeding & Yelton, 2011, p. 13). Other ILSs in the study were Polaris, Millennium, Library-Solution, Aleph 500, Evergreen, and Voyager, listed in order from highest satisfaction to lowest. A more recent study shows that the patron discovery product Enterprise fared only slightly better than its ILS counterparts. Enterprise ranked number seven in overall satisfaction of the ten products studied (Breeding, 2014, p. 35, 37, 40, 43, 45, 46, 48-51). The products that provided greater average satisfaction were EBSCO Discovery Service, WorldCat Local, Summon, AquaBrowser, BiblioCore, and VuFind; products that ranked below Enterprise were Primo, Encore, and Arena.

SirsiDynix does, however, have its staunch supporters. The Symphony system was praised by ILS researchers Ali and Rehman, who in 2012 reviewed several ILSs used in Saudi Arabia, as being “open, scalable and robust, offering a complete solution out-of-the-box, and unparalleled flexibility” (p. 15). Colose appreciates the flexibility of the SirsiDynix products in allowing different libraries in a consortium to set different system policies as well as the ability
to set up varying levels of access to staff modules based on the login used (personal communication, March 6, 2014). She said that the greatest flaw of the SirsiDynix ILS is that it was created by computer programmers, which means that there are some elements of the system that do not make sense to librarians. For example, “the call number is a discrete level in the hierarchy of the Items when all it is really is a finding aid” (D. Colose, personal communication, March 6, 2014). Another irksome characteristic of the e-Library interface is that clicking the “back” function in the internet browser causes an error message; instead, patrons must use the “Go Back” and “OK” functions within the system (SirsiDynix, 2014a).

**Conclusions**

SirsiDynix has a long history of evolution, and it endeavors to set the pace for modern library automation systems. The new BLUEcloud Suite (BCS) is the most recent example of this progressive drive. According to an article written in anticipation of the release of BCS, librarians are “intrigued” about BLUEcloud and interested in learning more about how it can be integrated into their libraries (Kelley, 2013, p. 40). Colose expresses similar interest (personal communication, March 10, 2014). With its use of the most current cloud technology, BLUEcloud-related products like MobilCirc and eResource Central will help to solidify SirsiDynix’s place among ILS vendors for years to come.
References


