



BY BARBARA FIEHN

# Library Automation in K-12

## A 2006 Update, Part 1

[*Editor's Note:* Last year, Barbara Fiehn put a magnifying glass to the sector of the library automation industry that's active in K-12 through her two-part series, "The Voice of the Vendors: Futures in School Library Automation, Parts 1 and 2," which ran in the May/June and July/August 2005 issues of MULTIMEDIA & INTERNET@SCHOOLS. In those stories, she shared the results of her conversations with Follett, Sagebrush, Companion Corp., Dynix, Mandarin Library Automation, The Library Corporation (TLC), Innovative Interfaces, Inc., and Sirsi Corp. This year, we've asked her once again to touch base with as many of these companies as she can to find out what's new and compelling in the market in general and in their offerings in particular. Barbara also identified several other important players in the K-12 automation market—Book Systems, Library Soft, and Surpass—and has added discussions of their products and services as well. Here, in Part 1 of her Library Automation in K-12 Update 2006, she covers these three companies and notes what's new at Innovative Interfaces, Sagebrush, and TLC.]

**LIBRARY** automation continues to evolve, so I've enjoyed connecting with several companies for first-time coverage in this series as well as reconnecting with companies I've spoken with previously. They're all listening carefully to customers to meet their changing needs, as you'll see below.

But before detailing my findings company by company, here are a few observations:

- As the vendors I contacted for this article spoke with me, I noticed their sense that IT departments and librarians are more actively comparing systems than previously. This strikes me as good for continued competition in the market. With the continuing budget constraints in the school market, purchase of the right system must be a careful consideration.
- Vendors continue, of course, to release new centralized systems. As they do, there is some concern by individual librarians about the changes taking place. The move to districtwide Web-based systems asks

library staff to adjust not only to change but to a whole new way of doing business. For some, this is a threatening environment; for others, it offers new opportunities to better serve patrons.

### THE THREE NEWLY COVERED VENDORS

#### *Book Systems*

Located in Huntsville, Ala., Book Systems offers Concourse and Atrium software with full automation services for multiple library types.

Need a stand-alone system? The PC-based Concourse meets that need. In addition to all the standard features, Concourse has a few special ones. The print options include templates for study program labels and donation bookplates. Concourse interfaces with district student records, and the search strategies include configurable Visual Searching.

If you want ease of administration and technology support, Atrium, the totally Web-based centralized system, is the choice. The single server structure reduces technology maintenance needs, and remote management by Book Systems is an available option. All management and searching functions can be accessed using any Web browser. Patrons can choose either text or visual searching in the OPAC. MARC records enriched with images, summaries, profiles, notes, contents, excerpts, reviews, and more are available dynamically through a partnership with Syndetic Solutions.

Both Concourse and Atrium have built-in cataloging utilities. An add-on cataloging utility, eZcat, allows downloading of MARC records from z39.50 Web catalogs.

I asked Book Systems what they most wanted to tell the readers of this article. In response, I was provided access to the children's visual search utility Kidz Viz. This is a delightful change from the other children's visual search interfaces I have seen. I recommend taking time to see this feature if you have a chance. Also, in response to requests for a collection analysis utility, Book Systems has partnered with Bound to Stay Bound to provide a seamless link for collection analysis.

#### *Library Soft*

Seattle-based Library Soft offers two automation programs: LIBRARYSOFT and LIBSOFTWeb. I found the products to be packed with features, of which the most interesting to me were the Library Map and the Visual Tree search.

LIBRARYMaP allows patrons searching for an item to click on the map option and see a red light flashing where the item should be in the library. RFID-enabled items will show the actual location of an item—a great feature for misplaced items. You can use photographs or drawings for the map. Multiple maps can be added so an entire school can be displayed to show every room and shelf.

The Visual Tree transforms searches into knowledge trees. Passing the mouse over a tree leaf displays subtrees of that particular leaf term. Double clicking on any item will display available subitems and move the item toward the display center. Another double-click will collapse all the subitems. Trees can be edited, and they can be created by the library staff to assist patrons with a need for predetermined searches.

Library Soft's staff asked me in particular to signal to readers the following: "Many of the features included in Library Soft products are not included or even available from other systems. Our challenge is to have our users become more aware of them so they can use them. We have a tremendous amount of depth in our product; few users ever access all features. Our primary focus has been to provide the best library system available at the lowest price possible."

Giving back to the library community, Library Soft has supported budget-constrained libraries with free Web hosting and has provided pro bono services and upgrades to small libraries with limited or no funding.

#### *Surpass*

Located in Calhoun, Ga., Surpass offers centralized, stand-alone, and small library automation systems. The Surpass Web site offers a comparison chart to help in selecting the most appropriate system. Surpass programs are supplemented by add-on modules for Z39.50 copy cataloging, serials, and enhanced content. Having used this software in my cataloging lab, I have found it to have a very intuitive interface with good help screens.

Centriva, the centralized program, blends browser-based catalog technology with a client-based circulation technology. Surpass Select is a site-based automation system. When desired, Select allows for upgrading to Centriva. This is a perfect option for school districts wanting to move to a centralized system one school at a time. Both systems use Safari or Web Safari catalog modules to provide OPAC access.

In the school market, Surpass staff told me that they are seeing a growing interest in RFID technology and blue-tooth inventory technology. Blue-tooth inventory technology has reduced a typical 10-hour inventory to a half hour, which is a dream come true for library staff!

An area in which Surpass feels it excels is customer service. Staff provide phone, Web chat, and, for Web-based automation customers, remote access help via server port 80, which allows the customer service representative to view and shadow the customer's active screen while talking via telephone. I have used the phone support and found the customer service to be prompt, helpful, and friendly.

As part of the next software update, Surpass will merge the Z39.50 copycat module into the main software.

## RECONNECTING WITH INNOVATIVE INTERFACES, SAGEBRUSH, AND TLC

While visiting with three automation vendors that I profiled last year, I asked what is new and what is coming in the near future. Here are their responses.

### *Innovative Interfaces*

Innovative has a new Web OPAC out, called WebPAC Pro. It is a free upgrade to Web OPAC libraries. WebPAC Pro includes Innovative's RightResult search technology, which provides users with significantly improved, relevance-ranked search results. An optional product available (for a fee) with WebPAC Pro includes a very robust spell-checker.

KidsOnline, an icon-based search for young patrons that works with the Web OPAC, has been improved. The intuitive, graphics-driven browser comes with presets, and the self-defined customization process has been improved.

Innovative's Millennium Via now also offers school districts features that are specific to school library media centers, such as homeroom-based notices, student bar code generation, plus overdue and customized reports.

### *Sagebrush*

InfoCentre, which launched just as we went to press in the summer of 2005 with my second library automation article, allows the choice of implementing a fully distributed or partially distributed infrastructure. Sales have exceeded expectations, with 4,000 customers currently. Version 2.2, released this past July, provides a number of improvements, including up to 50 schools per server, improved response time, and optional Sagebrush Enhanced Content.

Coming improvements include a district reports manager and a patron manager with an auto-update feature. New data aggregation collects all data for all libraries. The customizable data analysis tool will assist with many data needs including state reports.

Sagebrush is clearly making a commitment to helping libraries with advocacy and accountability, and better data analysis is one move toward meeting that commitment.

Long-range developments include linkages to state standards and the development of an advanced booking module.

[*Editor's Note:* Look for news of Follett's midsummer acquisition of these Sagebrush automation products online at <http://www.mmischools.com>, and in Part 2 of Barbara's Library Automation Update in the next issue of *MMIS*.]

### *TLC (The Library Corporation)*

New from TLC is Web Circ, a Web-based circulation interface designed specifically for schools that performs

basic circulation functions from an Internet browser. Its user-friendly interface displays student pictures linked to student records. Also included is class-set functionality and user-defined tabs with links to any Web application. Web Circ also allows the e-mailing of overdue notices, a great feature for those schools that are moving to a paperless environment.

AquaBrowser Library, which is now distributed by TLC, is visual concept-mapping software that works with any automation system. This software finds items using associations, stemming, and spelling alternatives within existing metadata, helping patrons who aren't quite sure how to best approach a search. It integrates electronic subscriptions, online databases, and periodicals, seamlessly melding findings with results from your catalog. I was introduced to AquaBrowser about 16 months ago and I was thrilled with the combination of mapping of word associations coupled with the ability to limit by media types. This is a major improvement in searching. You can check it out at <http://www.tlcdelivers.com/tlc/aquabrowser.asp>.

Be sure to check the next issue of *MMIS*, when I'll detail the news and updates to products and services from a range of other library systems vendors in the school sector.

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| COMPANY  | PRODUCT   |
|--|---|
| <b>Book Systems</b><br><a href="http://www.booksys.com/v2">www.booksys.com/v2</a>                    | Concourse<br>Atrium                                 |
| <b>Library Soft</b><br><a href="http://www.librarysoft.com">www.librarysoft.com</a>                  | LiBRARYSOFT<br>LiBSOFTWeB                           |
| <b>Surpass</b><br><a href="http://www.surpasssoftware.com">www.surpasssoftware.com</a>               | Centriva<br>Surpass Select<br>Surpass SL            |
| <b>Innovative Interfaces</b><br><a href="http://www.iii.com">www.iii.com</a>                         | Millennium<br>Via                                   |
| <b>The Library Corporation (TLC)</b><br><a href="http://www.tlcdelivers.com">www.tlcdelivers.com</a> | Library Solution<br>Library Solution<br>for Schools |
| <b>Sagebrush</b><br><a href="http://www.sagebrushcorp.com">www.sagebrushcorp.com</a>                 | InfoCentre<br>Accent                                |

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