



BY BARBARA FIEHN

# School Library Automation Revisited—2007!

*[Editor's Note:* Northern Illinois University library science professor Barbara Fiehn is back again, reporting on library automation for the school media community. This year, after working hard with an automation system to gain some new perspectives, she talked to other users—see her survey results in what follows—and to the vendors. Enjoy her update!]

I've spent part of this summer helping a novice media specialist automate a small, rural, K-12 media center. Sometimes this was arduous and other times it was a comedy of errors. Since we worked without training on the new automation system, many things were done by trial and error. Working without a shelf list, we weeded, downloaded records, bar coded, and reshelfed. Our first attempt to use the hand-held inventory unit was a disaster. Some of my school library science students volunteered to help, and those who were transitioning to the same automation system in their jobs this fall brought media specialists from their districts to get some hands-on experience before their training.

New spine labels still need to be printed and applied, but we are waiting for the second order of labels to arrive. The first order, contrary to the supply vendor's catalog indication, was not compatible with the automation system. After about 700 work hours (counting volunteer workers), we are thankful for the really user-friendly automation system and the invaluable and patient phone support staff.

The final step in this adventure is to give my cataloging and automation students some real-life experience this fall cataloging new books for this school's collection. After all, they have to practice on something.

### THE YEAR IN AUTOMATION—AN OVERVIEW

Others in the school library world are having their own adventures. Based on feedback from my students and a survey I recently conducted, many media specialists are spending the summer and fall being trained on and exploring new automation systems that have been and are being installed since classes ended last spring. There seem to be a number of factors influencing this summer's automation installations.

The end of July last year saw Follett acquiring the Sagebrush automation systems. As a result of this acquisition, schools are making decisions about continuing the use of their existing Sagebrush systems. Follett as well as other vendors have been offering schools deeply discounted offers to migrate from Sagebrush products. The recent announcement that SirsiDynix has ceased development of their existing products in favor of a new product may continue fueling the migration wave. However, SirsiDynix is stating a strong intention to continue supporting the existing systems.

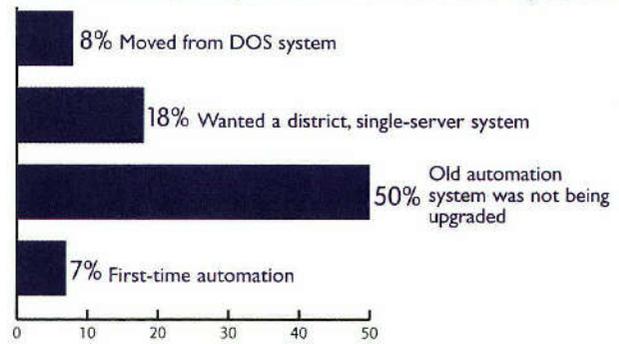
Growing districts are moving from stand-alone automation systems to centralized systems in order to more effectively manage maintenance costs for both technology and library staff. The ability to easily access shared MARC records either internally or externally generated is allowing a reduction in district-level cataloging personnel. Likewise, the centralization of technical-support activities is a great incentive for time-scarce school tech-support staff.

Remaining are the schools automating for the first time or migrating from old systems. A large number of school automation systems have not been updated since just before Y2K. (Remember Y2K? Seems a millennium ago.) Many legacy systems function poorly in today's technology environment. According to the "School Library Journal & San Jose State University 2006 Automation Survey" an article by Daniel Fuller, published in the October 2006 issue of *School Library Journal*, a large number of schools were two or more version updates behind the current version of their automation software. Changes in funding priorities account for a part of this lag. However, some of the lag is the result of librarians who are too work-stressed or uninterested to be aware of improvements offered in the newer versions of their automation software.

### MY OWN SURVEY

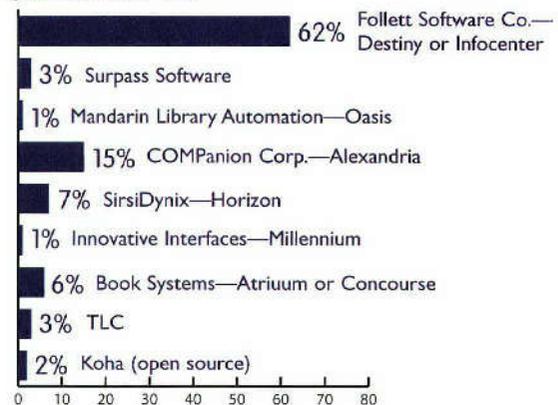
I conducted a survey in July, distributed via LM\_NET, ISLMANET-L (Illinois), and MEMOlist (Minnesota), on changing to a new automation system. As can be seen in Table 1, a vendor-abandoned system generated the largest need to move to a new system, followed by the need for a centralized system.

**Table 1. What prompted the need for a new system?**



Additional reasons included poor service, move to Web-based, textbook tracking needed, dying server, old or lacked needed features, needing Mac platform, and didn't like current system.

**Table 2. Which system are you considering or have you decided on?**



### SOME SPECIFICS FROM THE AUTOMATION COMPANIES

Once again, armed with some personal experience, user and survey feedback, and a sense of trends as noted above, I touched base with a range of automation companies to see what was new from their perspectives. Here's what they told me.

#### *Follett Software Co.—Destiny and Infocenter*

Recent update releases for both indicate Follett has finished the integration of Sagebrush automation products into the Follett Software Co. Both products provide users access to state learning standards, thus allowing correlations to be made between library materials and learning goals.

Adding to the Dolphin and Falcon hand-held bar code scanner is Follett's new Panther. This product provides better ergonomics, an easier to read screen, lighter weight, and one-handed functionality.

#### *Surpass Software*

Specializing in small, school, and church libraries, Surpass has a stable suite of automation options. The big news

## THE COMPANIES

**Follett Software Co.** ([www.fsc.follett.com](http://www.fsc.follett.com))  
**Surpass Software** ([www.surpasssoftware.com](http://www.surpasssoftware.com))  
**Mandarin Library Automation** ([www.mlalibrary.com](http://www.mlalibrary.com))  
**COMPAnion Corp.** ([www.companioncorp.com](http://www.companioncorp.com))  
**SirsiDynix** ([www.sirsidyndix.com](http://www.sirsidyndix.com))  
**Innovative Interfaces** ([www.iii.com](http://www.iii.com))  
**Book Systems** ([www.booksys.com](http://www.booksys.com))  
**TLC** ([www.tlcdelivers.com](http://www.tlcdelivers.com))  
**Koha** ([www.koha.org](http://www.koha.org))

from Surpass is the release of Searchpoint federated searching for use with all automation systems. With federated searching, any or all of a media center's databases can be searched within query. Also new is Surpass Reading Program Service (RPS). This subscription service automatically updates MARC records with reading levels for Lexiles and information for AR and Reading Counts!

### *Mandarin Library Automation*

Both Oasis and M3 have had recent updates and are SIP2-compliant. In keeping with Mandarin's philosophy of providing just the system the customer needs, both systems can be upgraded with add-on modules. The M3 product continues to be a free download. A reasonable annual fee provides support and updates. Both systems provide a multiple-language interface.

### *COMPAnion Corp.—Alexandria*

The release of Alexandria v5.5.2 announced the end of July provides improved stability and ease of use. The improvements include new Z39.50 MARC searching, the ability to schedule automatic SIF updates of patron records, and improvements in flexibility of reports with the ability to save multiple versions.

### *SirsiDynix—Horizon and Unicorn*

With new ownership and new top management, SirsiDynix is full swing into new product development. Unicorn and Horizon are still viable systems, however, all the development is going into a new system, Symphony. The new system, being built on the foundation of Unicorn, will merge the best features of the two previous systems. The Horizon version 8 update was moved over to Symphony. Look for a release of Symphony in 4Q.

SirsiDynix innovative SchoolRooms portal is becoming widely accepted. The newest contract for this service has recently been signed with the State Library of South Carolina, providing the portal to all public and school libraries in the state. Other recent contracts are with the city of San Diego and with the state of Delaware for a multidistrict portal.

### *Innovative Interfaces—Millennium Via*

Java-based Via is platform independent. This highly flexible, Web-based and -designed automation system links the collection, Web, and subscription content and provides the means for establishing an information portal. Designed for the needs of schools, Via is an easy-to-use graphical interface product. Since this product is platform-independent, it is easily personalized for a variety of users including those who use ADA-compliant applications.

### *Book Systems—Atrium and Concourse*

While Concourse, the PC-based product, is a very viable stand-alone system, it is taking second place to the fast-growing Atrium. This Web-based application operates on Windows or Linux and is accessed via a Web browser. The fully integrated system has been updated by the recent release of version 2 and has obtained Red Hat 4.x product certification. The KidZviZ primary search system is incredibly engaging. For older patrons, the ComPeer search provides links to other Atrium-based libraries as well as the local library. In addition to the integrated library system, specialized modules are available for advanced services.

### *TLC*

The expanding acceptance of AquaBrowser is the major news from TLC. AquaBrowser provides visual faceted searching. Well over 100 libraries are currently using this unique method of searching. The word cloud part of AquaBrowser helps patrons visually make word associations they might have missed in a standard searching environment. Take a trial spin at [www.tlcdelivers.com/aquabrowser/powerpoints.asp](http://www.tlcdelivers.com/aquabrowser/powerpoints.asp).

### *Koha*

A full-featured integrated library system, Koha is the first Open-Source Integrated Library System. Developed in New Zealand by Katipo Communications, Ltd., it is maintained by a team from around the globe. This is a system to watch. There are about 100 registered users and many more who use the system unregistered. The system was developed using recognized library standards and protocols, allowing Koha to interface with other library software and utilities. It is distributed free under the open source General Public License.

I've enjoyed my summer adventure exploring one new system in depth and updating myself in new automation features. There seems to be a continued abundance of choice. Personally, I am energized for another school year and looking forward to my next adventure in automation.

*Barbara Fiehn is an assistant professor at Northern Illinois University's College of Education, Department of Educational Technology, Research and Assessment. She teaches online searching and school library science classes including MARC cataloging and automation. She may be reached at [bfiehn@niu.edu](mailto:bfiehn@niu.edu).* ■



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