

CASE STUDY



UNIVERSITEIT VAN AMSTERDAM

Aleph at the University of Amsterdam

Evolving from the *Athenaeum Illustre* in 1632, the University of Amsterdam (UvA) now serves approximately 30,000 students and 5,000 staff members. Ranking among the largest comprehensive universities in Europe, UvA belongs to the League of European Research Universities. Education and research are conducted in seven faculties: Dentistry, Economics and Business, Humanities, Law, Medical Sciences, Science, and Social and Behavioral Sciences.

Challenge

The University of Amsterdam found that its integrated library system did not provide the robustness required for supporting the university's many libraries and extensive collections. The university needed a system that could easily support over 20 locations, diverse format standards, such as MARC 21 Format for Bibliographic Data, and essential services, such as radio-frequency identification (RFID).

Thirteen years into the use of its previous integrated library system (ILS), the University of Amsterdam (UvA) came to the realization that its complex structure, with over 20 sites, and its many varied collections could not be managed in a stable fashion by the system. In 2007, UvA decided to adopt a new ILS; the fundamental requirement was for a system that would provide a robust and powerful basis for innovations that the library wished to implement, including radio-frequency identification (RFID) and the MARC 21 Format for Bibliographic Data standard.

Stability with Flexibility

In creating its request for proposals, UvA developed a series of requirements ranging from "must-haves" to "nice-to-haves." The most critical demands were for proven technology; stability; functionality that would be rich enough to satisfy the diverse needs of a complex research library; interoperability with the university's technological architecture and infrastructure; the ability to deliver library innovations; and, of course, value for money. Given the university's many sites—with departmental libraries in over 20 locations—its huge set of cultural heritage collections, including those housed at the university's archaeological museum, and its cooperation with the Hogeschool van Amsterdam (University of Applied Sciences, or HvA), the capacity to support a complex infrastructure was paramount to UvA's requirements.

The Aleph system's proven ability to meet each of these requirements, underscored during a highly competitive evaluation process, led to the university's decision to select this Ex Libris system in the summer of 2008. Marc van den Berg, head of the library's electronic services at the time, explained that Aleph's management information tools (such as the ARC reporting system) and the system's seamless integration with the university's Oracle database clinched the library's final decision.

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Solution

UvA selected the Aleph® integrated library system in 2008 following an intense market evaluation. The system was chosen in view of its proven technology, stability, functionality that was rich enough for a large and complex research library, interoperability with the university's technological infrastructure, and the ability to deliver library innovations.

Results

After the successful implementation of the system and the data migration, both library staff and end users are pleased with the system's ease of use and efficiency. RFID has translated to greater availability of library services, and the customized OPAC interface has made a particularly strong impact, demonstrated by its heavy use by students and researchers.

UvA went live with Aleph on schedule in 2009. RFID—at the top of the wish list for services to be provided by the new ILS—was immediately implemented. The customized OPAC, which quickly became a favorite among students and researchers, clearly demonstrates the pride felt by the university implementation team and their personal commitment to creating a unique and powerful system.

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Collaborating for Success

As could be expected given UvA's complex structure and its more than 4.0 million volumes, the implementation of Aleph required the investment of considerable effort on the part of both the UvA library team and Ex Libris experts. Summing up the process, Mr. van den Berg described the university's close collaboration with Ex Libris as a great accomplishment: “I cannot say anything else than that Ex Libris personnel went to great lengths to make the project a success.”

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A partnership for the future

Looking to the future, Mr. van den Berg noted with confidence that Aleph will facilitate the library's efforts to provide more secure authentication, and, ultimately, to deliver single sign-on for all the university's systems. UvA is also looking to Aleph to help with their commitment to increasing the efficiency of some classical workflows within the library, such as acquisition and cataloging. Above all, a stable, powerful, and flexible ILS such as Aleph is essential to support innovations such as EDI, approval plans, automated metadata extraction, and communication with the Dutch union catalog. Aleph's support for the MARC 21 format will enable the library to interact more effectively with external systems and to take advantage of services from the OCLC WorldCat® global library network.

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Reflecting on the library’s relationship with Ex Libris during the implementation phase, Mr. van den Berg commented that he was impressed with the Company’s deep understanding of the requirements of a world-class research library. Ex Libris experts were knowledgeable, accommodating, and receptive to the unique demands of UvA—and continue to provide the same level of support now that the library has gone live with Aleph. “We very much appreciated the flexibility that Ex Libris demonstrated in the final stages of the project,” he noted. “The Ex Libris management team was most responsive and made adaptations wherever needed.”

Moreover, Mr. van den Berg felt that the university’s vision for the future of its library was compatible with that of Ex Libris: “The Company’s strong vision for the future of discovery and delivery, and of library systems, made a significant impact on the success of our project,” added Mr. van den Berg.

Ex Libris - USA
Toll Free: 1 800 762 6300
infousa@exlibrisgroup.com

Ex Libris - Italy
Tel: 39 051 0418019
info@libris.it

Ex Libris - Israel
Tel: 972 2 649 9100
exlibris@exlibris.co.il

Ex Libris - UK
Tel: 44 1895 824 440
exlibris@exlibris.co.uk

Ex Libris - Australia
Tel: 61 8 8139 1500
exlibris@exlibris.com.au

Ex Libris - Scandinavia
Tel: 45 20 71 73 09
info-scan@exlibrisgroup.com

Ex Libris - Germany
Tel: 49 40 89 809 0
info-de@exlibrisgroup.com

Ex Libris - China
Tel: 86 10 8857 5975
exlibris@exlibris.com.cn

Ex Libris - France
Tel: 33 (0)1 57 02 12 50
exlibris@exlibris.fr

Ex Libris - Korea
Tel: 82 2 2195 5432
korea@exlibrisgroup.com

Ex Libris - Singapore
Tel: 65-6478-2364
exlibris-asia@exlibrisgroup.com

