Eastern Kentucky University Navigates the World of e-Resources With SFX

Eastern Kentucky University Libraries made new advances in navigating the world of electronic resources by purchasing the Ex Libris™ SFX® link resolver in 2003. A few years later, in 2006, EKU again broke new ground by moving from hosting SFX independently to engaging Ex Libris to host the SFX services remotely as an application service provider (ASP).

Challenges

By 2006 the library's SFX server was three years old, out of warranty, and the hardware required frequent attention. The cost of purchasing and installing a new server as well as the cost of ongoing maintenance prompted the library to explore the option of outsourcing SFX hosting to Ex Libris.

Richmond, a small town in east central Kentucky, was an important crossroads town in early America. Pioneers such as Daniel Boone helped build the nearby Wilderness Road and open the western United States to exploration. Today, Eastern Kentucky University, founded in 1906, serves over 13,000 students and enables them to explore their futures in 168 degree programs.

So why did EKU choose SFX?

"It worked!" replied Kelly Smith, serials and electronic resources librarian at the EKU library. After evaluating other link resolver products in early 2003, EKU decided on SFX, concluding that it was the most mature product on the market. EKU was particularly impressed with the fact that SFX was a Web-based application rather than a locally installed client like some other link resolvers.

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EKU signed a contract for SFX in spring 2003. The library customized the SFX look and feel and display logic to adapt to site requirements. By July 2003, the customized application was in soft release, accessible to the university student body and faculty via the Get More icon on the library's Web site. After testing and tweaking the SFX configuration, the library released the application for general use in September 2003.

CASE STUDY

Solution

Once the decision to move to a hosted solution was made, the migration of data and the customization of screens and display logic to the remotely hosted server took about five to six weeks.

What clinched the decision for EKU was that, for the same number of dollars, they would not only receive remotely hosted services but also have Mr. King's time back to use for other application support and IT services.

Results

Since installing SFX in 2003, library users have been able to find resources that they couldn't locate previously. A rise in patron requests for interlibrary loans has been recorded. In 2007, most students on campus have had SFX for their entire academic careers at EKU and are used to using it as a tool. In addition to SFX link resolution, users at the EKU library frequently access the SFX A-Z list to find their journals.

Benefiting from a remotely hosted solution

By 2006 the library's SFX server was three years old, out of warranty, and the hardware required frequent attention. The cost of purchasing and installing a new server as well as the cost of ongoing maintenance prompted the library to explore the option of outsourcing SFX hosting to Ex Libris.

"The library's information technology (IT) department is small; there is one person to manage the library's applications, hardware, and software," Todd King, library systems administrator, told Ex Libris. "We didn't want to be in the server maintenance business. We would rather spend our time delivering applications than worrying about the technology overhead."

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In preparing his case for outsourcing SFX hosting, King worked with library administration to determine whether the library's goal was to minimize expenditures or maximize returns and to determine how best to spend the funds that the library had allocated for electronic resources and information technology services. He noted, "The objective for IT, and the library, is not necessarily to save money but rather to make the most beneficial use of the resources available."

Library total cost of ownership was a major factor in the decision to outsource the hosting of SFX services. As setting up and maintaining servers take time and expertise, consideration was given to whether library IT department staff could be better used at other, more productive pursuits.

EKU was no newcomer to outsourcing. It had long been the practice of the library, in purchasing shelf-ready, pre-cataloged books, to take advantage of cataloging services such as those supplied by OCLC PromptCat and Blackwell Book Services. With this experience, the decision to outsource SFX hosting was easier to make than it might have been.

Migrating to a hosted solution is made simple

Once the decision to move to a hosted solution was made, the EKU library set an ambitious migration goal. Ex Libris set up the EKU installation on one of its ASP servers, and the two servers—one at Ex Libris and the other at EKU—ran in parallel. According to Todd King, the migration of data and the customization of screens and display logic to the remotely hosted server went "very quickly; it took about five to six weeks." He noted that much of that time was spent working with content providers to update EKU's incoming IP addresses and not on hardware or software setup.

EKU library's existing SFX instance continued to run during the four months that it took for all IP adjustments to be made and the data migration to be completed, tested, and retested in the new remote environment. The hosted SFX system has run dependably ever since the migration was completed in mid-2006. Plans for the future include the addition of print titles, e-books, and local electronic resources.

ASP—a cost effective model

In researching the benefits of moving SFX services from in-house to remote hosting, Mr. King developed a spreadsheet comparing the costs of contracting for hosting SFX services through Ex Libris against the internal EKU costs for the care and feeding of a server in the library. What clinched the decision for EKU was that, for the same number of dollars, they would not only receive remotely hosted services but also have Mr. King's time back to use for other application support and IT services.

Gaining positive end user feedback

"Since we installed SFX in 2003, library users have been able to find resources that they couldn't locate previously," observes Ms. Smith. "We have seen a rise in patron requests for interlibrary loans since we included a direct link to OCLC ILLiad Resource Sharing Management Software (ILLiad) from the SFX menu. This is provided as an option for those resources to which we don't subscribe. And now, in 2007, most students on campus have had SFX for their entire academic careers at EKU and are used to using it as a tool." She notes that in addition to SFX link resolution, users at the EKU library frequently access the SFX A-Z list to find their journals.

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"Support has been excellent. We don't need to worry about monthly updates or daily backups, and worrying about our SFX hardware is a thing of the past," notes Todd King. "We recommend the remotely hosted solution for a library that doesn't have a large IT staff; that was our problem, and hosting SFX remotely solved it for us."

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