CASE STUDY

Linking with SFX at RWTH Aachen University Library

RWTH Aachen University is the largest university of technology in Germany and one of the most renowned technical universities in Europe. About 31.000 students are enrolled, most of them in engineering. Every year, a large number of international students and scientists come to the university to benefit from its high-quality study programs and excellent facilities, both of which are internationally recognized. Almost 5,000 international students are studying in undergraduate and graduate programs, including doctoral programs.

Challenge

With over 4,000 journals and a huge number of electronic information resources—which require diverse points of access—the library found that its e-resources had become difficult for users to navigate. The central library of RWTH Aachen University needed a link resolver that would integrate with the library catalog and enable users of a large number of departmental libraries to easily access e-resources.

The RWTH Aachen University central library serves as the main lending library for several branch libraries in Aachen, and a large number of departmental libraries. As such, it provides access to the information resources required for research, learning, and teaching, including over 1,200,000 printed volumes, approximately 4,000 journals, and an extensive set of high-quality electronic resources. In the mid-2000s, the library's e-resource collection began to increase markedly.

In Search of a Link Resolver

Having decided that the time had come to choose a new link resolver, the university library drew up a list of criteria for the selection of this system. "Our requirements included an easy-to-use OpenURL linking solution that could integrate seamlessly with the library's existing catalog while enabling staff to create local targets and generate statistics on library activity," explained Dr. Robert Eschenbach, associate director of the library. "On the product functionality side, our requirements included a lookup capability, the ability to create local targets, a customizable menu, an A-Z journal list, and support for moving walls*. Clearly, the quality and size of the product knowledge base were also important factors, as was the total cost of ownership."

As a consortium that supports a central system for other local libraries, RWTH Aachen University wanted to identify a vendor that is experienced in working with large, sophisticated libraries worldwide and can present strong references from these sites.

The proximity of Aachen to the border region of the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg, and the city's variety of cultural heritages have placed RWTH Aachen University in a unique position for international collaboration with other educational and research institutions as well as with business and industry. Thus, the consortium required a product with built-in support for Unicode alongside local support and training in German.

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*A type of embargo in which an online journal host waits a certain amount of time before publishing content from the most current issue of a journal; this system is practiced mostly by JSTOR.

Solution

After thoroughly investigating the OpenURL link resolver market, the library staff concluded that only the Ex Libris SFX® link resolver met all of the product functionality requirements defined by the library. A large and continually expanding knowledge base, a dynamic user community, and a strong local team for training and support were also key factors in the selection process.

Results

SFX has maximized staff efficiency in dealing with e-resources and has met the library's need for a genuinely low total cost of ownership. The library has fulfilled its strategy of combining all library e-resources in one portal, from which all services are offered.

Following a rigorous selection process, the RWTH Aachen University library found that the SFX link resolver and Ex Libris met all of the criteria outlined by the institution. "The quality and quantity of the SFX KnowledgeBase's e-journals, e-books, proceedings, and so on were major factors in our decision," said Dr. Eschenbach. "We were especially impressed by the huge set of resources in the areas of engineering and natural sciences." RWTH Aachen was also pleased to find that Ex Libris boasted a strong, independent local user community that was actively involved in the continual development of the Ex Libris product suite.

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From Selection to Implementation

"Ex Libris worked very closely with us to implement and train our staff on SFX," continued Dr. Eschenbach. "We were extremely satisfied with the support we received in the project phase. The staff assigned to our project helped us with ideas and configurations during the implementation. The system was ready for use straight after the training days."

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"We found the Ex Libris team to be very innovative and collaborative and now understand why the Company is considered a market leader. The Company's open-platform strategy and the EL Commons Web site provide interesting avenues for the library to explore, as well as opportunities to work with other members of the Ex Libris user community to share ideas and code."

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Good Results All Around

"SFX has served to maximize the efficiency of our library staff," noted Dr. Eschenbach. "Handy and easy to use and maintain, the system has also proved very successful with our end users, who enjoy quick results when searching for specific journals. The results are arranged in a fashion that best exhibits the electronic content offered by our library. SFX has truly enabled our library to fulfill its strategy of combining all library e-resources, previously residing on different platforms, into one portal—offering services from a central point."

With a view to the future, the RWTH central library anticipates the release of SFX version 4, which will include seamless KnowledgeBase updates and enhanced e-book support, such as the addition of author names to the SFX KnowledgeBase. Staff members at RWTH Aachen are looking forward to continuing to work with Ex Libris, and to witnessing the positive outcomes that the solution will yield for librarians and users alike.

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