



FAQ

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Ex Libris Alma FAQ

What is Ex Libris Alma and how it is related to URM?

Alma is a new, web-based solution from Ex Libris™ that utilizes our Unified Resource Management (URM) framework. Alma provides an open, extensible platform that will support emerging and future needs, positioning libraries to better serve the overall teaching and research missions of their institutions they serve. Alma lowers the cost of traditional library operations; its network-level infrastructure streamlines workflows for the management of print, electronic, and digital assets; and it offers new opportunities for collaboration, delivering increased efficiency and reducing redundancy within and across libraries.

How will Alma increase library efficiency and lower costs?

Alma will enable libraries to efficiently and effectively manage the full life cycle of all types of resources, regardless of format or acquisition method, at significantly lower costs than libraries incur today. By unifying the processes associated with obtaining, describing, managing, distributing, and analyzing diverse resources, Alma will assist libraries in reevaluating and redesigning their back-office processes, optimizing staff resources, integrating library systems more fully with other applications used by the organization, focusing new attention on underserved areas, and successfully addressing user needs.

Economic realities have increasingly encouraged libraries to seek new ways of working together at a network level. By offering a cloud-based solution with centralized data and services, Ex Libris Alma will support flexible models for collaboration across the functional spectrum—from cooperative collection development to more seamless sharing of metadata and resources with partner libraries. In this cloud environment, libraries will be able to join forces to leverage technical support, purchasing power, collections, and even staff knowledge and resources.

Today's library collections reach far beyond traditional published material including the management of such items as primary datasets and associated research output, learning objects, and institutional archives. Alma will provide the tools that libraries need for working in this new environment and expanding the library's role in managing the intellectual output of the institution.

Modularity and extensibility, facilitated by a service-oriented architecture (SOA), fully documented Web services and application programming interfaces (APIs), are keystones of the solution. Alma allows easy customizations and enhancements through locally developed code extensions that can be shared within the customer community via the [Ex Libris EL Commons Website](#), which serves as a host for collaborative efforts.

How will Alma differ from an integrated library system?

One of the key advantages of Alma—and a feature that distinguishes it from current integrated library systems—is the unification of workflows regardless of the type of material being managed or the method of its acquisition. In the foreseeable future, libraries will continue to work in a hybrid environment, managing different back-office processes related to print, electronic, and digital assets. Bringing together the selection, acquisition, management, and distribution of the entire library collection will provide new efficiencies, reducing costs and improving the service to users.

Libraries, however, will have to do much more than redesign current processes to achieve greater efficiency in order to meet the expectations of today's users: undertaking entirely new kinds of activities has become equally as important. While Alma incorporates the key capabilities of integrated library systems and electronic resource management systems, it is unique in that it will also enable libraries to go beyond traditional functions to provide new service offerings to institutions and the academic community. From its use of a centralized data-services environment to its unified workflows for all types of library assets, the URM platform on which Alma is built, offers libraries with a new infrastructure that will support different—and increasingly important—tasks: the management of an institution's intellectual output, a greater level of engagement in teaching and learning activities, and more. Although many of these tasks once lay outside of the library domain, changes in technology

and the academic landscape have created a demand for libraries to assume a stewardship role regarding their institution's intellectual activities and output.

When will the first version of Alma be released?

Alma development, which is made in close collaboration with diverse international partners, is currently planned for a beta release in mid-2011 and general availability in early 2012.

The first [Partner Release](#) was delivered to the [development partners](#) in June 2010 (and was described on the Ex Libris [Initiatives blog](#)). The [second Partner Release](#) was delivered in November 2010, and the third release is planned for end of Q1 2011.

Alma Functionality

What will the first release of Alma include?

The first release of Alma will support full life-cycle management for print and electronic resources, providing libraries with more streamlined processing and enabling them to lower management costs.

The first release of Alma will support areas such as:

- Acquisitions, including the management of both financial and license terms
- Cataloging and inventory maintenance
- Fulfillment including our *Smart Fulfillment*: a services to the end users in terms that are easy to understand, while using Alma unifies workflows and analytics capabilities to streamline and optimize the fulfillment workflows.
- Dissemination control, including a new tool for publishing the library's collection in user-discovery spaces
- Access to a central knowledge base, which will provide availability information to support ordering, managing, and linking to electronic resources
- Multilingual requirements
- Reporting and analysis tools necessary to make data-driven decisions about library activities and collections

The first release of Alma will also support a centralized system for managing metadata (the Metadata Management System) and a data-services environment, which together will provide new ways of creating, managing, and sharing metadata between libraries in the Alma community.

The Alma design and development effort is grounded in the Ex Libris commitment to open interfaces and community-developed software, enabling libraries to customize their deployment according to local needs.

How are you obtaining input from the library community about Alma requirements?

As part of its development processes, Ex Libris is working in close cooperation with library and industry partners as well as its worldwide user community. Specifically, Ex Libris has created the following formal collaborative roles:

- **Development partners:** libraries that are engaging with Ex Libris intensively to validate requirements and design and to participate in software testing
- **Alma focus groups:** functionally-focused groups to advise Ex Libris on specific requirements in the areas of selection/acquisitions, metadata, fulfillment, and consortium support. Ex Libris has worked closely with the ELUNA and IGeLU user groups to solicit nominations to ensure that libraries in diverse geographic regions and of diverse types and sizes would be amply represented.
- **Strategic partners:** Complementing the detail-oriented role of the focus groups, strategic partners which represent the wider library community, are charged with advising Ex Libris on emerging issues in the library landscape and helping to ensure that Alma remains aligned with the high-level goals of today's libraries.

If your institution is interested in participating in one of these activities, please contact Susan Stearns, VP of strategic partnerships, at susan.stearns@exlibrisgroup.com.

Where can I learn more about the conceptual design and functionality of Alma?

Ex Libris has published a white paper (located on the [Alma Resource Center](#)) that describes the conceptual framework of URM; this paper is an excellent starting point for learning more about URM framework and the planned functionality.

Ex Libris will offer numerous opportunities for libraries to learn more about the company's plans and to provide input, including regional information sessions, discussion groups at key conferences, Webinars, and postings on our [Initiatives blog](#). [The Alma Resource Center](#) is your source for details about these activities, as well as all of the latest information on Alma.

What does Alma mean for Aleph and Voyager customers?

With the move to a next-generation library management system, libraries will be able to "turn off" their current integrated library systems and begin working exclusively on the Alma platform. In this respect, Alma replaces Aleph® and Voyager®.

That said, Ex Libris recognizes that not all libraries will be ready to migrate to a next-generation system right away. Therefore, Aleph and Voyager will continue to be actively developed, enhanced, and supported; there is no planned end of life for either of the Ex Libris ILS products. In fact, the roadmaps for both Aleph and Voyager include many customer-requested enhancements, demonstrating the Ex Libris commitment to ongoing investment in our ILS products.