

Should I stay or should I go now? The challenges and opportunities for private law librarians when migrating to a new ILS product.

By Donna Rosinski-Kauz

You feel a sickening thud in your chest when your current ILS vendor tells you that they will no longer be supporting the product that you have loved, cursed, and maintained for several years or more. Or, you receive a call from your IS department telling you that your company will no longer be able to support running your current ILS system, and that you need to move to a system that they can run.

Panic ensues when you wonder what your options are, and they are vast. Do you stay with your current software vendor and migrate to their next-generation system? Your vendor certainly hopes that you will make that decision. The pros for making that decision include the fact that you will be able to negotiate a probably hefty discount in the price of the new product if you are migrating up from an older product in their software lineup. Another reason to migrate to a new product with the same software vendor is that the migration process from the old system to the new system will be set up to work relatively seamlessly.

Choices for ILS products have increased significantly over the past few years, however, and you really should investigate all options before deciding to simply migrate up to a next-generation product with the same software vendor. You might be able to purchase a product from a different vendor that is cheaper, easier to use, and has more functionality than your current vendor's new product. Some vendors are offering web-hosted ILS systems, and you might be able to buy access to a more powerful system than what you are currently using. If you have an IS department that has the time to help you make your decision, you should discuss with them what they are looking for in software products and how they would like to be able to run the software. If your IS department is too busy to spend an often considerable amount of time conveying the changing needs of your company's IS parameters, which can include their needing to speak directly with software vendors, then the web-hosted products are a very good idea to consider.

If you decide to migrate to a new product with a new software vendor, how do you get from point A to point Z? Your old software system should be able to export a file of your bibliographic records. Hopefully, the file will contain full MARC format records. If it contains a text file instead of full MARC records, you will need to convert the text file records into full MARC format. Often libraries contract with third-party vendors to perform this and other data migration steps. The third-party vendor takes the text file and massages the information into full MARC records. These records can then be loaded into your new ILS product. Item level information can be transferred using MARC fields such as the 852 and the 949. Ask your new vendor for the specific requirements regarding transferring item information. Your new software vendor should be able to import information such as patron records. Circulation information can also be transferred successfully much of the time. Serials check-in information can sometimes be transferred, but it is much more difficult to migrate successfully. Using the MFHD (MARC Format for Holdings Data) can speed up the process of creating predictive serials

check-in records. Some ILS vendors and third-party vendors can take your serials information from your old system and create records in the MFHD to allow for the migration of serials check-in data. At the point of migrating from one system to another, the library might want to consider adding other third-party vendor products to the mix, such as performing authority records control or barcoding each item in the collection.

In preparing to write this column, the author interviewed a third-party vendor who performs data conversions. He stated that all conversions are different because of dealing with various ILS products on both ends of the process and each library's local policy decisions. He also stated that serials check-in information is still very difficult to transfer properly. The librarian whose library is migrating from one ILS to another should ask the new software vendor to provide contact information of other libraries who have performed similar migrations. In a perfect world, your old software vendor will work to help you migrate away from their product. However, you might face resistance from the old vendor, especially if they have a new product to which they want you to migrate. It pays for the librarian in charge of the data migration to find other libraries with similar needs and priorities that have already jumped from A to Z. These librarians probably will be happy to help ensure a successful data migration for all.