

ILS AS(A)P!

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If your library is ready for an integrated library system (ILS), but you do not have the staff or computer equipment to set it up and run it, consider using an Application Software Provider (ASP) who will sell a subscription to an ILS product, help you set up your system, and will maintain the system on its company servers. You will not need to worry about upgrading servers, installing software upgrades, or hiring and training dedicated systems staff, thus saving a substantial amount of money each year, while still being able to offer your users state of the art library software. Time for my disclaimer: I work for Cassidy Cataloguing Services, Inc., a company that has offered an OPAC product since 1990, and is now offering a web-based ILS product with OPAC, serials control and routing, acquisitions, and circulation modules. It is called CassidyCat 4.1, and it is based on the Cuadra Star product. Cuadra also offers an ASP service for their ILS product. I became interested in writing this article because part of my job at Cassidy Cataloguing involves writing documentation and training our clients to use the CassidyCat 4.1 product.

ASP providers have been offering knowledge management and records management products to companies for years, and many library software vendors are now offering ILS system services through ASP agreements. The beauty of leasing an ILS product through an ASP agreement is that a library can theoretically afford a bigger system than they might be able to purchase and run within their institution. Not having to budget for purchasing new servers every few years, for example, can save an organization a tremendous amount of money. Hiring an outside company to run a library's ILS also means that the librarian does not need to learn much about the software platform or about maintaining the administrative levels of the software, which can take a huge investment of time and effort.

Libraries will still need to train their existing staff to use the ILS product. Some ASP services can help libraries build parts of the ILS, such as setting up serials check-in frequency information, but most of an ASP's responsibilities will be with giving access to the client's ILS, storing the client's information on their servers, making necessary upgrades to the software, and maintaining backups of the database in case of disaster (which can occur far more frequently than one wants to contemplate!)

If the client library has never had an ILS or OPAC product before, then the library will need to purchase or create bibliographic records for their library's holdings. Many companies exist that can help libraries compile records to reflect their holdings. Usually libraries purchase MARC records from these companies, which can be loaded into the ILS products. Once the MARC records are in the ILS, the real fun starts! Entering accounting information and serials frequency information can take a great amount of time and effort, but once the records exist, they should roll over to the next year, unless the library wants to delete the information.

The following companies offer ILS products through ASP agreements. This list is not definitive. I am sure that I have not discovered every ILS vendor that offers such a product. However, I think this list will give the reader a place to start researching information about ILSs AS(A)P. Cassidy Cataloguing Services, Inc. (www.cassidycat.com), Cuadra (www.cuadra.com), EOS International (www.eosintl.com), Softlink America (www.softlinkamerica.com), CyberTools for Libraries (www.cybertoolsforlibraries.com). Again, the only product with which I am on a first name basis is CassidyCat 4.1. Based on my use of it, I can recommend it and the Cuadra Star product. I have no experience with any of the other products, but wanted to give the reader a list of companies and products to explore. Enjoy!