

The Auto-Graphics AGent Library Management Platform

Helps Rural Library Consortium Expand Services, Streamline Cataloging Operations, Share Resources, and Save Money

Auto-Graphics has allowed NCKLS to lower their OCLC costs phenomenally. SHAREit and VERSO, the powerful components of the AGent Library Management Platform, save NCKLS \$28,000 per year, a 58% reduction in costs.

CHALLENGE

What's the best way to provide the benefits of community library service to rural areas and small towns spread across a wide geography? The challenge of meeting the needs of small and isolated communities requires creativity, teamwork, and library support products that are both flexible and cost-effective. The North Central Kansas Libraries System, NCKLS, was formed as a consortium to provide library service to such communities. They chose VERSO® as the product with the versatility and responsive customer care they needed.

SOLUTION

Cost Savings, Expanded Services

Resulting from the use of VERSO and the AGent InterLibrary Loan (ILL) solution SHAREit

NCKLS Assistant Director, Carol Barta, shared some of the ways that VERSO and the AGent interlibrary loan solution SHAREit have helped NCKLS improve service to the libraries they serve. She says, "A few years ago we were able to start a state-wide courier service and between that and the integrated interlibrary loan it has really enabled libraries to bring anything that their patrons want to them. Interlibrary loan has increased a lot because it's so much easier to do. Patrons can see what's on the shelf, and it's a pretty seamless operation with everything in there. A number of member libraries have also turned on the patron-initiated ILL. Patrons just need to log in and send their requests."

In addition to expanded and enhanced delivery of materials, NCKLS has also benefited from cost savings on cataloging their materials. Barta says, "We've been able to lower our OCLC costs phenomenally. The most we paid in a year was formerly \$48,000 and now we're down now to about \$20,000. When we were cataloging each library individually, we would have to go out and enter an OCLC holding record for every library. Now that we have the consortium, we put that record on once and it shows up as KKM in OCLC. But when it's searched through the SHAREit system, it shows which library has the book."

Consolidation has helped libraries save money by sharing popular holdings. "We noticed early on," Barta says, "that everybody buys the new James Patterson book, the Laurie Snelling, the Janet Evanovich. We were hitting OCLC 22 times and now we only hit it once. That's made a huge difference in the cost."





The "Best Value" In Library Management Software

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SOLUTION

NCKLS Assistant Director, Carol Barta, explains how the libraries who would become members of the consortium came to select VERSO. "We had some grant money, so we put three or four libraries on stand-alone VERSO systems. We had two libraries which wanted to try Sagebrush (soon after purchased by Follett), because they wanted to have their own servers. So we did the two set-ups to see which system the libraries liked better." Barta had previously worked with Follett in a school library setting, and further explained, "One of the reasons that we picked VERSO to begin with was that it looked familiar to our librarians because they had previous experience with SHAREit, the resource sharing portion of the AGent Library Management Platform because the VERSO system looked familiar to them, and they all liked it."



When the next grant round came, the librarians decided to form a consortium and to use VERSO to help manage their library system. Barta described some of the challenges they faced as they worked to build the consortium database, consolidating records from a diverse array of rural libraries. "The 22-member libraries share a bibliographic database which I have been cleaning up. I've been working my way through correcting a lot of cataloging errors," she says. Tools provided by VERSO have been helping with the clean-up task resulting from the earlier work of well-meaning but untrained catalogers.

Seamless and Efficient Cataloging

VERSO has made cataloging with CatExpress seamless and efficient. Barta describes the process: "We basically make a cart on OCLC and those of us who catalog here have a place to download to. We do a 'bib tool administration' and search for that file number. Within a couple of minutes, it's in and the libraries can add their holdings to it. We don't have to attach holdings here at the NCKLS office. People can put their barcode and their holdings in as they get the books. The record is already out there for them to use. In that way, each library processes its own holdings. The consortium's bibliographic records are generally entered by someone at the system center in Manhattan or by the professionally-trained catalogers in the Abilene or Junction City libraries. The nice thing about the consortium is that it's very likely that somebody else already has that book."

Carol Barta's ongoing work includes combing her way through the database and cleaning up the records while providing consulting and training for member libraries' staff. Barta values the tools in VERSO that assist her to help the branches with their cataloging challenges. She says, "If they get a gift book or something, a lot of them will do their own cataloging. That's part of my clean up and part of working with them individually to train them to do the records the correct way."

"For the most part, there is usually an existing record available for them to use. Or if they can't find it already in the NorCat database, they can go out on the interlibrary loan. I've asked them to please only use records from the little list of trustworthy sources that I give them because we know places like Norwest Passage and SwiftNet get their cataloging from OCLC. For those records, you say 'edit bib record' and it populates your database. VERSO has streamlined a lot of our cataloging."

“VERSO has streamlined a lot of our cataloging....cataloging tools valued by NCKLS include copy cataloging, the snip tool, and the ability to merge and overlay records.”

Easy access to copy cataloging has helped Barta with the challenge of maintaining clean and complete catalog records. To help prevent incomplete “brief bibs” from entering the system, she uses the snip tool provided by VERSO. “We have far fewer brief bibs than we did,” she says.

Barta also considers the snip tool invaluable for cleaning up catalog records that were not optimized in earlier years. Barta says, “When we began the consortium, we were downloading the records from a wide variety of places. Some of those old records were not very good. They were from systems that didn’t use full MARC. Little by little those records are going away, and we’re getting better records.” Barta uses the snip tool to quickly and easily remove bad records and send them to the holding libraries to be replaced.

“I also love the feature that I can use to merge and overlay,” Barta says. “If I do find a record that just needs a little clean up and I can tell what the book really is, then I can just merge if there’s another good record out there or use the overlay tool. For example, some people put dashes in their ISBNs and that keeps them from consolidating into one record.”

Each library in the consortium has its own patron database so that they can customize records according to their unique needs. VERSO enables them to set up different circulation rules for each library. Barta describes the kinds of information unique libraries might want to collect. “For example,” she says, “Dorothy Bramlage Library in Junction City wants to know what military unit the patron is in or that the family is attached to. It helps them track that person down if they can’t find them in some other way. It gives them another point of contact.”

About VERSO

The VERSO integrated library system (ILS) is designed to help libraries manage their resources while significantly improving patron information discovery and service delivery. VERSO meets the requirements of library systems ranging in size and composition from a single branch library to diverse multi-branch consortia. The system has been developed to seamlessly deliver a range of configuration preferences and to provide localization and centralization options. VERSO is built on a module structure, giving it unparalleled flexibility in terms of packaging and value to the library community. Rather than forcing libraries to fit into rigid system requirements, VERSO can be customized to meet every library's unique needs.

About the North Central Kansas Libraries System

The North Central Kansas Libraries System (NCKLS) is a regional network of cooperating libraries whose purpose is to better utilize human and material resources by sharing planning, programs and services. The consortium includes twelve counties with a total service population of about 238,900 residents. In addition to the 22-member libraries, the network also provides support services to public libraries, universities and colleges, as well as six “outlet” libraries which take advantage of the NCKLS rotating book collection. Sharing and co-operation define the central mission of the consortium: provide assistance to each library in the region, support libraries with information and resources, provide equitable access to libraries, and help eliminate barriers to service by working together for the success of every Kansas library.

“VERSO is the best of both worlds. Auto-Graphics has always been really very responsive to what people ask for. The teamwork that goes along with it [the vendor] has really been good. I do recommend Auto-Graphics and VERSO.”

RESULTS - Delivered via the Cloud - 100% Software as a Service (SaaS)

Carol Barta notes the advantage of having VERSO delivered via the cloud rather than having it installed locally. “My tech people really appreciate that. We have two tech people and over 300 machines in the system. It would be impossible for two people to take care of 22 servers,” she says.

Barta cites another challenge to the consortium that isn’t unique to rural libraries. “Patrons across the country are flocking to their local libraries in record numbers to use the Internet. Students, genealogy researchers, job seekers, and job re-trainers are coming to the library, not only to use the computers, but also to get help with new technology in general from e-books to e-readers to online services of all types.”

“One of the things our libraries do is provide wireless access that stays on 24/7 for the most part. So even if the library is not open, people will go and sit in their cars out in front of the building to access the Internet for coursework and things like that. Many of our libraries are open less than 20 hours a week altogether, but they know people are going to need their services. So the library isn’t always just the inside of the building--- it’s that wireless connection that allows people to use it. We even have stories of neighbors who bring out the hot chocolate when it’s cold and they see people out there working on a class or something,” she says. Very small libraries, like those open only 20 hours a week, serve communities of 300 to 600 people and may have a staff of one librarian and a few volunteers.

Barta also appreciates the level of customer service consideration the consortium receives with VERSO. “Another thing I really like,” she says, “is that when there’s a new roll-out and everyone gets it and you have thousands of pairs of eyes on it, looking for glitches and things that aren’t working, it gets fixed in record time. In the Manhattan Public Library where our office is located, they have an ILS from another vendor and they literally had to turn everything off for a day while they did their upgrade. People couldn’t get to Sunflower e-library, Hoopla, or Consumer Reports. That all had to be turned off so they could do their update.”

“That doesn’t ever happen with VERSO. Auto-Graphics schedules things so it goes on at a down time, and the next day there are all these super sleuths on the case, trying to make sure everything is working. What’s good about that is that things can get fixed quickly and a problem doesn’t get compounded because enough different people see it so that it becomes clear what the issue really is,” Barta says.

Barta recommends Auto-Graphics and VERSO to anyone who enquires. “One of the reasons we picked VERSO in the first place is that we knew we didn’t have the staff in our system to be able to do something like Open Source. The systems that went with Open Source all had to add staff, and we just didn’t have the money to do that. VERSO is the best of both worlds. Auto-Graphics has always been very responsive to what people ask for. The teamwork that goes along with it has really been outstanding. I do recommend Auto-Graphics and VERSO all the time.”



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