University of Wisconsin-Madison

The new resource-sharing approach delivers positive impacts

After working with Ex Libris on the development of Rapido, one of America's best public universities saw an immediate impact from the resource-sharing solution's more encompassing approach.

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About the University of Wisconsin-Madison:

The University of Wisconsin System is a state-wide network of public universities. As one of the world's premier public university systems, it has over 170,000 students enrolled at 26 campuses. The University of Wisconsin–Madison (UW-Madison) is one of the system's leading public research universities and ranked 38th overall and 10th among public institutions by U.S. News & World Report's 2022-23 ranking. It is organized into 20 schools, with over 35,000 undergraduate and 14,000 graduate students. The university is also the largest employer in the state, with over 21,600 faculty and staff.

The UW-Madison Libraries support collections in more than 20 locations across a 938-acre campus, ranging from large research collections numbering in the millions to small departmental libraries with a few hundred volumes. UW-Madison's Interlibrary Loan Department employs six resource-sharing professionals for borrowing and lending, as well as 12 to 15 student employees. The department processes about 200,000 borrowing and lending requests every year. UW-Madison Libraries collaborate closely with other Big Ten Academic Alliance (BTAA) libraries and all the UW System schools.

A Fresh Look at Resource Sharing

Madison Libraries have been using multiple resource-sharing solutions in parallel. They have been managing physical item loans among the University of Wisconsin System campuses with Alma Resource Sharing since May 2015, when they adopted Ex Libris Alma as their unified library services platform. For other requests, UW-Madison Libraries use RapidILL, the peer-to-peer resource-sharing system, and ILLiad.

As part of BTAA, the leadership of UW-Madison Libraries began taking a fresh look at resource sharing. Their vision of next-generation discovery to delivery includes leveraging networks of institutions to increase access to diverse collections for the benefit of library patrons. This includes addressing the full end-to-end process of discovery, acquisition, and delivery, from how patrons experience resource-sharing services to the behind-the-scenes workflows of resource-sharing librarians and the technology they depend on.

For UW-Madison Libraries, the shift to a more encompassing approach to resource sharing is also perfectly aligned with their mission of expanding the impact of education on people's lives beyond the boundaries of the classroom.

Memorial Library, the largest library on campus

A Discovery-to-Delivery Solution

UW–Madison was part of a diverse group of leading academic institutions and consortia that worked with Ex Libris to develop an end-to-end, discovery-to-delivery, patron-centric resource-sharing solution – Rapido.

As UW–Madison Director of Library Systems and Application Services Bruce Barton noted at the time, "We want to enable our patrons to use our main discovery tool to easily obtain an item through the library – any item, whether or not we own it or license it – and to be able to choose the delivery option that best meets their needs."

Service-level expectations among patrons have changed, based on their experiences elsewhere in the online world. Rapido helps library patrons obtain all types of materials faster, more accurately, and efficiently thanks to a centralized holding index and intelligent searches. The team at UW-Madison Libraries especially noted the benefit to patrons of Rapido finding requested items held by other institutions and automatically determining which is the best lender in each case. Unlike other resource-sharing options, the solution identifies if the requested resource can currently be lent out and considers borrower needs, like time-to-delivery, format, loan terms, and more.
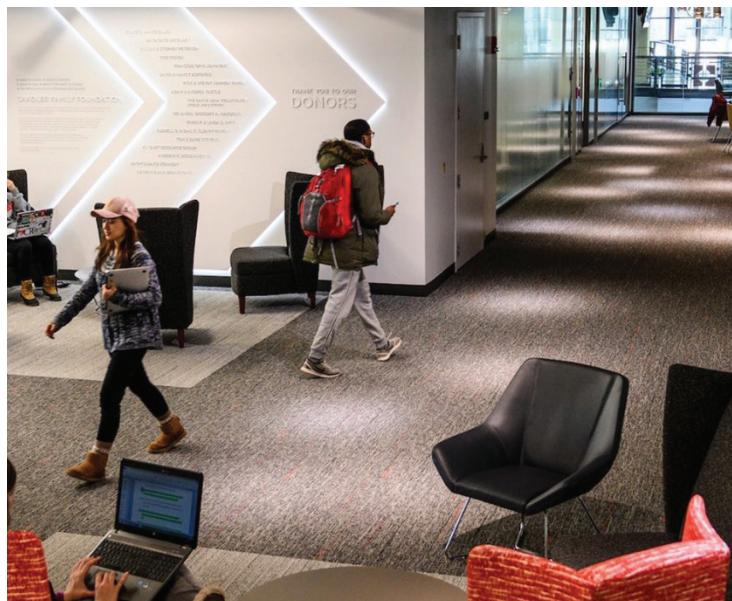
Rachel Watters, Director of Resource Sharing, adds that "the centralization and personalization of Rapido make resource sharing an outstanding experience for library staff, as well. Much of the borrowing and lending processes are automated, and librarians can manage all their local and resource-sharing requests within a single system account."

Another key consideration for UW-Madison Libraries to adopt Rapido was its open platform, making it easy to integrate with third-party systems, including other resource-sharing provider systems and resource-sharing technologies. They use Rapido APIs to fully integrate public-facing functions, such as obtaining offers and placing a request, into the discovery platform developed by UW-Madison, for a seamless, coherent user experience.

Rapido provides full workflow support for both resource-sharing and circulation staff processing resource-sharing requests for institutions across the country, effectively expanding upon RapidILL. In addition, as a very large, net lender with a massive volume of circulation and resource-sharing requests, UW-Madison Libraries took advantage of the Rapido APIs to automatically and effectively divide pick-from-shelf requests between circulation and resource-sharing staff based on a set of custom routing criteria. APIs for Ex Libris Primo and for WorldCat are used to extend searches for items in the UW-Madison Libraries catalog to items held at other libraries.

UW-Madison Libraries had ongoing access to Ex Libris product developers for guidance on how best to integrate Rapido with other systems and where the APIs could play an effective role.

This eased the transition to the new resource-sharing platform, as did the fact that Rapido follows the same general workflows as traditional Alma Resource Sharing, with which the circulation staff was already very familiar.

Business Library, located in Grainger Hall, the home of the School of Business

Improved Interactions Across UW – and Beyond

Rachel Watters, Director of Resource Sharing, explains that "the adoption of Rapido has enhanced and improved the borrowing and lending processes at UW-Madison Libraries. Rapido has saved staff time and ensured faster turnaround time for loans with the elimination of several steps in resource sharing and most transaction fees, far less need for manual mediation, and extensive intelligent automation."

Rapido automation and centralization make it possible for UW-Madison librarians to manage a higher volume of requests and focus on more value-added activities. In addition, with requests for physical materials automatically appearing on the owning library's pick-from-shelf list, staff members save a lot of time and can get materials to borrowers faster. Rapido also eliminated the time-consuming process of printing special labels or wrapping bands on physical resource-sharing items thanks to the shared barcode functionality. This relieved what was the most severe bottleneck in the resource-sharing workflow.

The UW-Madison Libraries team also noted the impact of two other Rapido functionalities that streamline their work by concentrating and organizing information more efficiently. One is the ability to see licensing terms for electronic collections at the point of processing lending requests. Rachel Watters called it "fantastic," adding that it is "a functionality we've wanted for years and never had until we implemented Rapido."

Rapido has brought circulation and resource-sharing staff at UW-Madison Libraries into a closer working relationship, as well as opening up and expanding external resource-sharing relationships. Librarians at UW-Madison are forming new close connections with universities in geographical proximity, including leveraging a common courier system and working more with institutions they had borrowed from or loaned to very infrequently in the past. Rapido provided UW-Madison the opportunity to form a resource-sharing relationship with the non-Rapido SWITCH consortium in southeastern Wisconsin.

"We're looking forward to see how our borrowing and lending patterns change with these new relationships," Watters says.

About Ex Libris, Part of Clarivate

Ex Libris, part of Clarivate, is a leading global provider of cloud-based solutions that enable institutions and their users to create, manage, and share knowledge. In close collaboration with its customers and the broader community, Ex Libris develops solutions that increase library productivity, maximize the impact of research activities, enhance teaching and learning, and drive student mobile engagement. Ex Libris serves over 7,500 customers in 90 countries. For more information, see our website and join us on LinkedIn, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter.