



Pathfinder Project: Exposing Union Catalogue Metadata Via Third Parties

Introduction

This document should be read in the context of the three following documents, which are available on the Library and Archives Canada website (link) *Library and Archives Canada's Story Continues*; the *Documentary Heritage Management Framework*; and the *Acquisition Orientation Instrument*.

This document is part of a series of eight discussion papers that seek, through practical projects, to validate the four guiding principles and four key roles of the *Documentary Heritage Management Framework* developed by Library and Archives Canada (LAC) during summer and fall 2009. Specifically, each pathfinder project seeks to demonstrate the applicability of these principles and roles in the context of the acquisition business pillar. Each pathfinder project will result in a final report, which will add overall conclusions about the implementation of the *Documentary Heritage Management Framework* and the *Acquisition Orientation Instrument*. Based on observations, the final report will be even more effective in contributing to the achievement of LAC's mandate, within the current operating environment.

Background

As part of its broad mandate to preserve and make accessible Canada's documentary heritage, Library and Archives Canada (LAC) maintains a union catalogue in AMICUS, a national database containing bibliographic descriptions, locations and holdings information of participating libraries. Historically one of LAC's most visible and valued supports to Canadian and international libraries, the Union Catalogue plays a critical role in the infrastructure that facilitates resource sharing and resource discovery at the local, national and international level.

For more than 50 years, Canadian libraries have voluntarily contributed their bibliographic metadata to the Union Catalogue, and LAC has ensured that this is processed, aggregated, and cohesively integrated into a national union database. Presently, the Union Catalogue features approximately 65 million library holdings and 23 million bibliographic records. This metadata aggregation is made freely available for multiple uses, including copy cataloguing and inter-library loan.

Optimizing the exposure of the metadata

As the foundation for comprehensive resource discovery and sharing activities for Canadians, the metadata in the Union Catalogue has clear value and is used on a daily basis. However, is the value of this metadata presently being optimized to the benefit of both Canadians and Canada's collective of libraries? How might we – LAC, Canadian libraries, and other stakeholders – leverage this metadata more effectively?

One approach to leverage this metadata is to increase its exposure. Increased exposure will result in improved discoverability for Canadians and an accompanying increase in the metadata's value. OCLC (for Online Computer Library Center) and the Open Library project are examples of leaders in the world's information sphere, both representing different approaches to increasing the exposure of library metadata. OCLC's union catalogue, WorldCat, aggregates information from over 70,000 library collections from around the world. It provides participating libraries with increased visibility through enhanced data flows, syndication, synchronization and linking. To further these ends, OCLC has also signed a number of agreements with Google, including one that links Google Book Search to WorldCat.org. Open



Library's approach is to allow any system to link to the data as well as for any library to add their metadata and get access to the data via a number of open protocols. These and other innovative approaches are evolving as the infrastructure for sharing data improves, creating a rich and vibrant information landscape, [Users and researchers benefit from improved access to libraries' digital and analogue collections, and consequently they benefit from an ever-improving discovery experience.](#)

In the context of improved discoverability, a number of options to expose metadata could be explored for the national union catalogue. One possibility would be to reach an agreement with third parties, such as OCLC or Biblios.Net, for data sharing. Other possibilities might be to provide access via a range of open protocols and interfaces (i.e. making it more accessible to harvesting) or to expose the data to the emerging Semantic Web by publishing the union catalogue as linked data. Any or all of these possibilities might be worthy of investigation, particularly in an information sphere where,

“ Metadata will continue to rise in importance—With the never-ending explosion in information, metadata will continue its ascent in helping to enable findability and navigation. Entity identification, fact extraction, and other semantic enrichment tools will continue to expand in popularity. ” (Mark Logic Corporation CEO Dave Kellogg, Content Wrangler Blog, December 2008)

The challenges, next steps

While increased exposure of library metadata benefits libraries worldwide, ensuring that this metadata remains freely available for re-use, in support of resource sharing and other activities, is also a key focus for libraries. This consideration has recently prompted heated discussion of issues related to records sharing and re-use (i.e. who really *owns* bibliographic records).

It is likely that more options and additional requests for exposure, sharing and re-use of the union catalogue metadata will surface over time. Given this reality, what ethics, values and principles could underlie decisions about how and where metadata can be exposed to promote greater sharing and re-use? For Canada's library community, could other concerns – in addition to intellectual property issues – emerge with respect to metadata aggregated in Canada's union catalogue?

Given that the union catalogue is the result of a pan-Canadian collaboration of libraries, and that LAC acts as the steward for this metadata aggregation, it will be imperative that stakeholders reach a consensus about what will constitute acceptable uses for exposure of metadata. LAC intends to engage with the Canadian library community, both contributors and non-contributors to the union catalogue, to develop a joint position on AMICUS data exposure, sharing and re-use. The object of these discussions will be to address data-sharing issues from a Canadian perspective, ensure that the wealth of metadata in AMICUS is appropriately leveraged on behalf of Canadians through our partners and stakeholders in the Canadian and international library communities, and maximize flexibility for the future.

Conclusion

The final report in March 2010, will describe the results obtained by the implementation of the project described in this document and will be used to achieve the objectives of Library and Archives Canada (LAC) in two respects. On the one hand, each of the eight pathfinder projects will produce operational specific deliverables, which will develop approaches and practices of



LAC in respect of certain specific activity areas. On the other hand, the lessons learned during the implementation of each pathfinder project, in the context of the four guiding principles and the four key roles, feed the LAC approach to the acquisition, preservation, and the resource discovery of Canada's documentary heritage. Your comments and feedback on this discussion paper will support the modernization work of LAC, as it prepares to revise its approach to meet the challenges of the digital environment in order to continue fulfilling its mandate, and thus better serve Canadians.