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Program Report: Local Systems Roundtable—What Does the Next Generation System Look Like?

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Local Systems Roundtable—What Does the Next Generation System Look Like?

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Marshall Breeding was the speaker for this program, which was coordinated and moderated by Marjorie Crawford (Rutgers University Law School Library). Mr. Breeding is an independent consultant, speaker, and author. He is the creator and editor of *Library Technology Guides*, in which capacity he is THE expert watching the trends in library automation. To quote Mr. Breeding, he "lives and breathes" this stuff and we are very fortunate that he comes to conferences like AALL's to share his observations with us. Mr. Breeding was the OBS-SIS VIP in Boston, and he spoke on a number of programs on July 23, 2012.

Mr. Breeding gave a brief historical overview of the development of integrated library systems (ILSs). Back in the 1990s, mainframe-based systems were the norm, followed by the migration to the less expensive client-based systems in the 2000s. Currently, the trend is toward cloud-based systems, a transition that is likely to take approximately another decade in his estimation. These system changes reflect changes in our libraries, as well as technology. There has been a fundamental shift from the need to manage mostly print collections to collections of e-resources, upon which academic libraries spend the majority of their budgets. This shift has been accompanied by a proliferation of systems from many different vendors which all too often do not communicate well with each other in the client-based systems environment.

The cloud-computing systems being offered in today's marketplace were also referred to as multi-tenant SaaS (Software as a Service) by Mr. Breeding. Vendors host these systems for libraries, thus freeing up library staff time for other work. They offer more predictable annual subscription costs as a way to deal with uncertain budget times. These systems are web-based, with no workstation clients, and upgrades are universal and incremental. They represent movement from individual to highly consolidated or unified workflows. Mr. Breeding prefers the term Library Services Platform as the name for this type of library system now emerging. These are the backend or staff systems, which do not have an OPAC component to them as in the past. Instead they are accompanied by a discovery solution meant to provide a "dazzling" interface to our library's end users.

The Library Services Platform products available at present are:

- OCLC WorldShare Management Services: A network-level approach to management and discovery; in production in a number of libraries.
- Alma (Ex Libris): A cloud-based system with consolidated workflows and separate zones (community and local); in production in a number of libraries, including Boston College which just went live in early July 2012.
- Intota (SerialsSolutions): A knowledgebase-driven system still in development; scheduled to deliver in 2014.

- Sierra (Innovative Interfaces): A hybrid approach, with cloud and locally hosted options; in production at a number of libraries; the most contracts were signed for this system in the past year.
- Kuali-OLE (Open Library Environment): An open community-source system focused on interoperability with other campus systems; it is still in development.

This new cycle of transition represents a lot of development resources being invested by system vendors, as well as by libraries assisting them in the process and then replacing our legacy systems. The trend should be away from the present one of dealing with a multitude of vendors/systems in different pieces and parts that may not fit well together and back toward purchasing a suite of services from one vendor. Mr. Breeding predicts that the front (discovery) and backend (management) systems should reconverge and integrate more naturally.

In the Q&A, there was a question about the RDA/MARC transition process. Mr. Breeding commented that we are making baby steps along the path to realizing the benefits of the Semantic Web, linked data, and the design for various metadata schemas. But these are long processes and libraries cannot wait for all issues to be resolved before moving ahead. As the speaker commented early in his presentation, these are interesting times in terms of library systems. I would add that they are highly ambiguous times, in which we are operating on what often feels like the leading/bleeding edge of change, not knowing exactly how our system challenges will ultimately be addressed. I am encouraged, however, by Mr. Breeding's observations that we will find answers in these developing systems and thus be able to serve our users even more effectively as we move forward.