The Central Knowledge Base, value and enhancement

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The Central Knowledge Base, Value and Enhancement

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For some of Ex Libris' products, the software is not the only major component of the system. SFX, Verde, and MetaLib all have a dynamic data element called a Central Knowledge Base (CKB), branching away from the more traditional software services that library automation vendors provide and traversing into the realm of data services. The CKB is a huge value-added aspect of these systems as they contain the necessary data to help manage the resources for which each system is responsible.

Over the past year, the SFX, MetaLib, and Verde Product Working Groups have been in active discussions with Ex Libris about the best way that the IGeLU and ELUNA user groups can cooperatively participate in the CKB enhancement process. This cooperation stretches not only across the user groups, but also across the product groups that have knowledge bases. The goal is to develop as consistent a CKB enhancement process as possible while leaving a little flexibility for specific procedures that may be required for each separate product. This work has been facilitated by the User Groups/Ex Libris Product Development Collaboration Agreement and the great work that the MetaLib Product Working Group carried out last year with the MetaLib software enhancement process. While the existing software enhancement process offers some useful models for moving forward with the CKB enhancement process, the nature of the CKBs are different enough from the software, that the CKB enhancement process will require some variations from the software enhancement process.

There are many issues to consider for enhancements to the CKBs. Perhaps the most important concern from the IGeLU perspective is the notion of "regional" resources - resources that are extremely valuable to a particular country, geographical region, or language group. By definition, these resources have a smaller constituency than some of the more global resources like Science Direct and Springer. This issue has been one of major consideration for the Product Working Groups in the last six months. We want to ensure that any enhancement process will not always leave these important resources on the bottom of the priority list.

Right now, we are evaluating the best way to create a voting structure for the user groups' CKB enhancement priorities. We have two potential models on the table

for consideration and each has its strengths and weaknesses.

First, the process could be continuous, where customers would vote through a "me too" mechanism. On the date that Ex Libris would need to know our priorities to consider them for the next enhancement cycle, they would take the top resources from the list. Should we adopt a procedure like this, we could look at then taking a handful of regional resources and reserving a few spaces in the priority list for them each month. The benefits to this process would be that it would follow the flow of the CKB update process. The drawbacks are that members might forget to vote if the process is continuous and that it is hard to define a "regional" resource and its constituency. In many cases even North American institutions are interested in non-English resources and could feasibly vote for them.

The second method would be to have a defined voting deadline, probably on a quarterly basis, where the user groups would vote in a similar way to the software enhancement process. Under this model, one possibility would be to give each of the regional user's group a special "weighted" vote to ensure that some of the regional resources will always make it to the top of the priority list. Ex Libris would then take the top resources and distribute their investigation and implementation of those resources throughout the quarter. The benefit of this process is that members might be more likely to vote if the voting process is on a defined schedule. Also, this model eliminates the need to define a resource as "regional" by giving the regional user's groups the control to determine which resources are most important to them regionally. The drawbacks to this process are that it requires a little more formal management and that it doesn't follow the enhancement cycle as closely. It is also possible that a resource could be proposed after a voting cycle and it would then have to wait around for three months before it would even be considered.

How the list of requests to be voted on will be implemented is still under investigation. One option is to use the system that will be selected for software enhancements. Comments and feedback from MetaLib, SFX and Verde customers would be very helpful in deciding about the best method to go forward. Please send comments to ckb@igelu.org.

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