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Ex Libris "Developers Meet Developers" Meeting 2008 Jerusalem

By Lukas Koster, Library of the University of Amsterdam and Mark Dehmlow, University of Notre Dame

The first official meeting between Ex Libris' and customers' developers was held at Ex Libris Headquarters in Jerusalem on November 12 and 13, 2008. The purpose of the meeting was to bring together developers from libraries and Ex Libris product developers to begin building a developers community. For the libraries, this represented a significant opportunity to have unfiltered conversations with those closest to Ex Libris' product development. For Ex Libris, it was a chance for developers to see how libraries were extending their products and hear the benefits, challenges, and needs of us who work closely with their products. 13 representatives from 10 customer institutions in the USA, the Netherlands, Finland, Sweden, and Germany, who use Aleph, SFX, MetaLib, and Primo and who are actively involved in developing plug-ins, add-ons and extensions to one or more of these products, attended the meeting. We had the chance to meet with Ex Libris product developers and development managers to discuss the new open-platform strategy and specifics about the products we were most interested in. A separate meeting will be organized in the USA for Voyager developers.

The two days were divided into 4 main sections:

- an introduction to the open-platform strategy by Ex Libris
- participants' presentations
- working groups per product
- reports from working groups, discussions and conclusions.



Work in progress 1st day (Lukas Koster)

Open-platform strategy Introduction

The first day started with a welcome by Einat Zviran, Vice President of Development, and Tamar Sadeh, Director of Marketing and also leader of the open-platform program. Shlomo Sanders, Ex Libris Chief Architect, presented Ex Libris' roadmap for the open architecture of Ex Libris systems both as it stands now and what they are thinking of for the future. Shlomo gave us a privileged look into where Ex Libris hopes to take the open platform and the various programming interfaces to their products. Much of this information hasn't been made public yet, so we are unable to share all of the details, but undoubtedly, Ex Libris will be announcing aspects of this strategy in the year to come. What we can say is that the plans look exciting, and offer extensions to the products that will fulfill on some of the customer wishes we have heard over the past couple of years, as well as extending access to the products that we hadn't even thought of.

Revital Marck, Aleph Development Manager and Open Platform Program Development Leader, presented the realization of the open platform program. She outlined more specifics about how Ex Libris is formalizing the open interfaces to their products, how these interfaces will be carried out, and what this will mean for us developers. She discussed issues like commitment to backwards compatibility, how product documentation will support our efforts, how consistency across products might be achieved, and what tools Ex Libris might be able to offer to support validation of the open interfaces and what kinds of samples they might be able to provide. Some of these ideas are in the formative stage and aren't quite fixed, so it gave us an opportunity to provide feedback into Ex Libris' direction.

Participants' Presentations

After lunch, 7 customer institutions gave presentations covering some of their local developments and/or challenges with Ex Libris products to a large audi-

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Ex Libris "Developers Meet Developers" Meeting (cont.)

ence of Ex Libris staff. One presentation (regarding the need for back-end and management API's) was held on the second day.

Working Groups per Product

The morning of the second day was dedicated to meetings between Ex Libris developers and customer representatives on specific products (Aleph, SFX, MetaLib, Primo). For each product, three or four customers representatives and three or four Ex Libris developers talked about product specific issues and more general cross-product and EL Commons topics. They also discussed API development plans for each product and brain stormed ideas about other services that customers might be interested in having exposed through APIs. These working groups were very useful and gave an opportunity for developers to have practical discussions of the products as well as an opportunity to talk about the products on a more fundamental level. All working groups reported their findings to the complete group after lunch.

Reports from Working Groups, Discussions and Conclusions

The last part of the two days was used for summarizing and discussing a number of more general issues, mainly focused on the structure of the EL Commons platform. All attendees agreed that EL Commons needs more content, better internal and external integration, and a more vibrant and active community. While there were many ideas on how to accomplish this goal, there will need to be more discussion on how to drive participation. Everybody agreed that the meeting should be repeated. In order to keep these meetings as efficient as possible, we all agreed that the group should not be



Dome of the Rock (Lukas Koster)

too large and the collective feeling was that participation should be offered to people who actually contribute content to EL Commons. So next year's library developer group composition is likely to include some familiar faces, but will also open opportunities for others to participate.

Social Events

In addition to work there was also an opportunity for entertainment and leisure. On the first evening Ex Libris organized a tour of old Jerusalem by night and a very nice dinner party at a fantastic restaurant that gave us all a taste of the regional fare. On the second evening the Ex Libris support staff invited everybody for drinks at the "Dublin" Irish pub.

All in all, this was a tremendously productive meeting for all of the developers, both ours and Ex Libris'. Building robust openness into commercial products is not a trivial prospect and what is most encouraging is that Ex Libris' planning around this effort is starting with some initial dialog about their direction with those of us who are most engaged in extending their products. We got a unique look into the heart of Ex Libris' organization, how they plan and execute product plans, and a chance to meet those, often anonymous, people that are responsible for building their systems. We also got a privileged look at Ex Libris' strategies going forward.

There is much work ahead to ensure that this community is active and engaged. As customers, we will need fervent and engaged participation to keep the momentum going and to ensure the lasting success of this effort.

We can safely say that the friendly and warm reception by Ex Libris made all participants feel very welcome and we are grateful to Ex Libris for their hospitality and openness during this meeting. We can't wait for the 2009 meeting. In the meantime, it is never too soon to begin contributing code to the developer's zone and to begin building a robust developer community.

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