**Follett’s Destiny Library Manager:**

**A “Total Solution” for School Libraries?**

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**Introduction**

When one envisions a school library of the 1950s, one thinks of a calm, orderly environment with students consulting the *Reader’s Guide* and others studying silently, carefully avoiding the librarian who seemed austere and distant. Indeed, mid-twentieth-century librarians thought of little more than their collections, so mired as they were in the quagmire of manual organizational systems. Days were filled with keeping track of loaned and overdue books, identifying, ordering, and processing new purchases, checking in serials, maintaining a card catalog, and other endless duties. Spare time was spent taking inventory to establish which books had been stolen and needed replacement. Library functions required hours of typing cards, forms and labels. Little wonder the patron was an afterthought, and the tranquil atmosphere in the library was not peaceful but forced. Until automation, librarians only dreamed of providing the services expected of information centers today.

In the early days of computers, using them for library tasks seemed to some more trouble than they were worth. The black and green screens, arcane commands and blinking cursors of early systems were unfathomable. Automation has come a long way in both technological sophistication and consideration for the user. Today’s integrated systems are attractive, inviting, intuitive, and genuinely helpful. And school libraries, which have traditionally been a step behind larger institutions in offering the latest technology, are finally catching up. For years, lack of money to buy the equipment, lack of awareness of what the systems offer and how they work, and lack of understanding about their influence on library services all played a part in delaying school library automation. Most school libraries bought their first systems only twenty years ago.

Since then, the industry has consolidated to a few major vendors in a fiercely competitive market. Schools who had automated in the 1980s are currently replacing their outdated “legacy” and PC-based equipment. Schools now want to manage multiple assets, from library books, audio books and films, to a/v equipment, textbooks, and digital objects. They prefer district-wide systems for greater control, resource sharing and efficiency, and they desire all the convenience of the Internet. Library resources, whether free, paid, or locally-available, should be retrieved in a single search with an easy-to-use interface. In an environment where open-source beckons the cost-conscious, profit-oriented automation companies are racing to develop systems with the most features and the highest level of service at an affordable price. No system offers every new technology, but school libraries have increasingly chosen Follett Software Company’s products for their balance between simplicity and sophistication (Breeding, 2008, p. 37, 40).

Follett’s top product, Destiny Library Manager, offers a completely Web-based system that is marketed as a “total solution” to organizing multiple assets for the entire school district. With a highly customizable interface and a content-enhanced OPAC, Destiny offers all of the traditional functions of an automation system with a myriad of conveniences. Not only can librarians now purchase materials through the vendor’s TITLEWAVE system, they can quickly download MARC records that contain hyperlinked subject terms, tables of contents, user reviews, and book cover images. WebPath Express integrates educationally-approved websites into the catalog, along with records for books, films, and other materials. Today the patron has virtually “everything” at his fingertips. But appreciating the features of any automation system is difficult without an idea of their development--from the austere systems of the past to the bejeweled configurations of today.

**A Brief History of School Library Automation**

Almost a half century ago, computers were exciting, mysterious machines that promised relief from some of librarians’ most tiresome procedures. During the 1960s the Library of Congress developed the break-through MARC (Machine Readable Cataloging) record so that information about books could be displayed in a standard bibliographic format readable and searchable by a computer. MARC records could be shared among libraries, reducing the burden of original cataloging. Yet the expense of the equipment and the dearth of ready-made software meant that few libraries could afford to experiment with automation. University and public libraries were among the first, with software written in-house and run on their institutions’ mainframes (Bilal Meghabghab, 1997, p. 3). These early systems often comprised a single function, such as circulation or acquisitions (Bilal, 2002, p. 1). A few school systems explored automation during the early years--Albuquerque, NM began an automated central processing system in 1963, Madison, WI cataloged with a computer-based system in 1967, and Shawnee Mission, KS developed a batch ordering and cataloging system the following year (Driver & Driver, 1982, p. 21-22).

Mainframes had become commonplace in larger businesses by 1970, and progressive school librarians urged colleagues to use computer equipment already on campus to benefit the library. Accounting programs could calculate library expenditures, word processors might produce bibliographies, and label printing systems could turn out spine labels and shelf list cards. Yet the very idea of computers seemed overwhelming to many librarians, who suddenly appreciated the tangibility of their paper cards and forms. Citing expense and lack of expertise, they waited to automate, and some librarians actively resisted. In 1970 crews attempting to implement the Oregon Automated Library System in a school library had to withdraw when they found the staff antagonistic and uncooperative (Driver & Driver, 1982, p. 21-22).

Developments in the late 1970s through the following decade made automation more attractive and attainable. Beginning in 1976, Apple introduced the Apple II and five years later IBM followed with the PC. These microcomputers sat on an individual’s desktop and were independent from a mainframe. As their price declined and their processing and storage capabilities improved, school libraries began to purchase microcomputers while vendors developed compatible automation software. One of the first systems was created in 1981 when Colorado Computer Systems developed Computer Cat for the Mountain View Elementary School. Computer Cat had three main components: OPAC, Cataloging, and Inventory. Its OPAC allowed users to search by author, title, and subject. Soon software developers invested in “turnkey” systems that offered coordinating hardware and software. After 1987 the creation of MicroLIF, the Microcomputer Library Interchange Format, enabled librarians to import MARC records into automated systems using floppy diskettes. This protocol, today called USMARC/MicroLIF, allows librarians to “copy catalog” by downloading pre-written MARC records for most books—saving librarians from time-consuming original cataloging (Bilal Meghabghab, 1997, p. 4).

Early systems were stand-alone, including one or more modules, such as Cataloging, Public Access (OPAC), or Circulation. Each component operated independently from the others. To save money, modules could be purchased separately, but because they did not share a common database, a user identifying a book of interest in the OPAC would then have to check Circulation to see whether it was available. By the early 1990s, vendors began to introduce Integrated Library Systems (ILS) with interrelated modules that shared a common database. Patrons viewing a record in an OPAC today see data taken from the cataloging module and determine whether the book is available through Circulation. An acquisitions module alerts users when materials are on order, and Interlibrary Loan indicates when they are on loan to another library (Bilal, 2002, p. 4).

Until the 1990s, systems were also closed, meaning that automation software was loaded onto the local computer, often at the circulation desk, with no connection to remote machines. Any “outside” contact was through the librarian himself who might key in MARC records or download them from a CD-ROM. When automation systems became compatible with the Z39.50 protocol, they could “talk” to each other, allowing staff to consult other libraries’ catalogs. Vendors such as Follett began to offer services such as Alliance Plus, which enabled MARC records to be downloaded directly from the vendor’s computers, eliminating the need for CD-ROMs (Rubin, 2004, p. 82, 86, 89).

Some of the most visible changes in automation systems unfolded in the late 1990s, when technology developed twenty years earlier was finally incorporated into affordable options. In school libraries, users observed that the number of terminals available to search the catalog blossomed from one to several, and within a few years, networking enabled access campus-wide. Character-based DOS systems were replaced with Microsoft Windows which provided a more intuitive graphical user interface, or GUI. More systems claimed to be Z39.50 compatible, and several were “open,” permitting access to remote computers offering fee-based services such as DIALOG and WILSONLINE (Bridge, 1993, p. 54).

By the turn of the century, the growth of the Internet inspired vendors to explore ways in which library catalogs could incorporate resources available on the World Wide Web. Follett introduced the 856Express which linked subjects in the MARC record to related websites (Bilal, Barry, & Penniman, 1999, p. 45). Just a few years later Follett introduced Destiny, its completely Web-based automation system. Although most school libraries were still using legacy systems, many were ready to migrate to a new one, and vendors busily developed new Internet-enabled features such as hyperlinked subject terms in the OPAC, book jacket images displayed with searches, and tables of contents, abstracts, and reviews offered along with standard bibliographic information (Breeding, 2002, p. 51).

Modern automation systems are similar at heart to their ancestors: they have a minimum of three modules including an OPAC, Cataloging, and Circulation. OPACs provide the same information found in card catalogs but allow advanced searching capabilities. Whereas card catalogs provided author, title, subject headings, and call number, computerized catalogs permit keyword and Boolean searching as well. Keyword searches scan the entire catalog record for the search term, not just the subject headings. Boolean logic allows users to filter queries with “and,” “or” and “not.” Search terms can also be truncated, so patrons typing in librar\* will retrieve items with either “library” or “libraries” in the subject heading. OPACs also permit users combine search strategies, such as searching both author and title or author and subject at the same time. Many web-based catalogs feature hyperlinked terms which link users to records for related items (Bilal, 2002, p. 2-3). OPACs in an Integrated Library System display copy status, indicating how many copies of an item are owned by the library and whether they are available.

Whereas the OPAC is the interface seen by the user, Cataloging and Circulation are normally the domain of the librarian. The cataloging module makes the OPAC possible by acting as a database from which records of interest are queried using the OPAC. Librarians may create their own MARC records or import them from external sources, such as a CD-ROMs or remote libraries. Because of the time and training required to perform original cataloging, most libraries opt to use other libraries’ records and amend them to suit local needs. Records saved in the cataloging module provide the brief description viewed in the OPAC. Circulation keeps track of loaned materials. Overdue notices, holds and reserves, fines, and circulation statistics are generated from data available in Circulation.

Many systems offer additional modules such as Acquisitions, Serials, or Interlibrary Loan. Acquisitions keeps track of material requests and receipt, purchase orders, the budget, and vendor performance. Serials organizes periodical subscriptions, and Interlibrary Loan coordinates the borrowing and lending of items among libraries. Utilities addresses database problems, management, reports, statistics, and customizing the automation software (Bilal, 2002, p. 3).

The right automation system is undoubtedly time-consuming to choose, install, and maintain. It is also expensive to purchase, considering the costs of equipment, software, record conversion, labels, and barcodes. The staff must then be trained to use the system, which will be periodically unavailable during power failures and interruptions to Internet access. Librarians have found, however, that the benefits of automation far outweigh its drawbacks. The increased efficiency enjoyed by both librarian and patron have enabled a new relationship where collection maintenance can take a back seat to customer service. Because the librarian’s tasks can be performed in a fraction of the time, librarians have been able to think about what matters most to the patron, and explore how they can best deliver it (Bilal, 2002, p. 4-7).

**Follett’s Destiny Library Manager**

The numerous advantages of automation make implementing a well-designed system a necessity for the modern school library. “Schools themselves, even small schools, are now complex organizations that create and use vast quantities of information… and … as the information needs of students, teachers, and school administrators increase and become more complex so does the need for a powerful information management system” (Clyde, 2000, p. 2). School librarians have responded to this need, and at least 85 percent of school libraries reported utilizing automated catalog and circulation systems by 2000 (Prestebak & Wightman, 2000, p. 68). One popular school library automation system is the Follett Destiny Library Manager. Approximately one out of every four US public schools report using Destiny Library Manager, and Follett reported a major increase in sales in 2007 (Follett Software Company, 2008). Why is Destiny Library Manager such a popular choice among school librarians? Library Manager is a Web-based, integrated management system that “… combines circulation, cataloging, searching, reporting, and management” (Destiny Library Manager, 2008) into one relatively-easy-to-install system that requires little technical knowledge to maintain. Furthermore, Destiny is primarily designed for school districts that wish to gather individual schools into one database to facilitate streamlined reporting and sharing of resources (Minkel, 2003, p. 48).

**Components of the System**

Destiny Library Manager is an open integrated retrieval and management system with mechanistic and adaptive objectives. Integrated systems have components that function together to increase functionality and management of multiple resources. Other advantageous functions of integrated systems include providing powerful search options, allowing patrons to create custom bibliographies, and possible expansion to include new material formats. (Cohn, Kelsey, and Fiels, 2001, p. 61). Destiny Library Manager achieves integration through its four main components: the Catalog, Circulation, Back Office, and the Home Page. The mechanistic or formally dictated objective of Library Manager is fulfilled through the circulation component of the system which checks materials in and out in the same manner every time. The adaptive aspect of Destiny Library Manager continues to evolve as each new version of the system becomes more collaborative through features like Destiny Quest. (Destiny Quest is a graphics-enhanced search interface that includes prominent top ten “check out” and “new arrival” charts.) Another feature that fulfills the adaptive objective is the Interactive Catalog that allows patrons to rate or review books in the Catalog component (Library Manager Participant Guide, 2008, p. 93). It is reasonable to expect that future versions of Library Manager will continue to add adaptive features. Two aspects of Destiny Library Manager demonstrate that it is a relatively open system that interacts with other systems and its environment. Library Manager is a Schools Interoperability Framework certified product, which enables the system to share information with other School Information Systems and is capable of importing data such as student personal information or identification numbers (Destiny Library Manager, 2008). This compatibility greatly reduces the amount of time dedicated to data entry and instead frees the school librarian to collaborate with teachers and students on curriculum issues (Sharp, 2005, p. 2). Destiny Library Manager also works in concert with Follett’s other management systems, Asset Manager and Textbook Manager, to produce a comprehensive picture of the school’s holdings and a particular patron’s status (Destiny Library Manager, 2008).

The web-based catalog of Destiny Library Manager is the system component that is most visible to patrons. This component offers the patron complete access to the library’s catalog at any time and from any Internet-accessible location. Destiny Library Manager provides several powerful search options to the patron. The Basic Search function offers searching by keyword, title, author, subject, series, or award-winner status. Patrons wanting a more robust search experience can use the Power Search function which includes the basic search options with Boolean logic and limiters such as material type or publication year. Additionally, Destiny Library Manager offers a visual search choice for patrons that displays materials sorted into frequently-used categories that are represented by colorful icons. All search functions can be customized by the librarian to best suit the age group of students. (Felix, 2003, p. 56) Once a search term is entered into any of the search formats, the patron receives a list of titles that matches the search term. The title records contain a wealth of information for the patron including title, author, availability, publication information, reading level, review citations, and an Explore feature that provides links to additional materials under different but related subject headings. If needed, Destiny Library Manager has the capability to check other district schools’ catalogs for a desired item. Follett offers two popular add-on features to Library Manager to enhance the search process. WebPath Express is an attempt to address the concern that students often fail to choose accurate and reliable resources by providing what Follett claims is over sixty thousand Internet sites and library materials that are ” …evaluated for objectivity, currency, authority, credibility, and educational value” (WebPath Express, 2008). TitlePeek, the other popular add-on feature, incorporates an image of the resource’s cover into the bibliographic record and may also provide additional information such as the table of contents or reviews (Library Manager Participant Guide, 2008, p. 75).

Today’s students are digital natives and many prefer a more visual or graphic search interface. Follett has recognized this and created the Destiny Quest search feature. Destiny Quest, the graphic search interface, is designed to look more like a web page than a traditional OPAC. A Destiny Quest search begins with a keyword search and eventually allows the patron to narrow search options by author, title, or format. Search results are graphically depicted and appear on more of a virtual shelf that can be manipulated rather than a static list of bibliographic information. Destiny Quest will have more collaborative features in the newest 9.0 version of Library Manager including a wish list feature that allows patrons to suggest titles for the collection and a “did you mean” prompt to help patrons when a search term produces no results (What’s New in Destiny 9.0, 2008).

“Maintaining an accurate catalog is a critical function for the school library media specialist and the cataloging module must support this function” (Schultz-Jones, 2006). The Catalog component of Library Manager automates those tasks for the librarian. The Add Title function allows the librarian to input acquisitions into the catalog. A drop-down menu lists a variety of formats that can be added including books, maps, recordings, or video. In order to maintain authority control, the librarian can order materials and import the MARC records from several sources such as Alliance Plus, other district libraries, or other librarian-designated Z39.50 sources. Existing title records can be searched by title, author, LCCN, ISBN, or ISSN. The Add Title feature can also guide the librarian to create new title records when an existing record cannot be found by using the Marc Editor or Easy Editor templates. Titles can also be imported from vendors or exported to other libraries in order to share records. Occasionally, a librarian may want to add specific subject headings to improve patron search results, and these site-specific subject headings can be added by the Update Title function. Featured prominently on the Add Title page is a link to Follett’s TITLEWAVE, a Web-based collection development tool intended to make ordering from the Follett Resource Company an easy process. Eventually copies will have to be removed from the collection and the Update Copies function gives the librarian the option of deleting individual copies or groups of copies (Library Manager Participant Guide, 2008).

A vibrant school library circulates many items each day, and the Circulation component of Destiny Library Manager helps a busy librarian manage the numerous check-ins, check-outs, renews, and holds that occur all day long. Materials can be easily checked out by using names, barcodes, student photographs, or by manually inputting the title. The check-in function is designed to be as simple as check-out and can be completed by scanning the material’s barcode or inputting the title. In-library use can be recorded in the Circulation component to provide a clearer picture of library material usage. In Destiny Library Manager, holds can be placed by patrons with Destiny user names and passwords from the Title Record display or by the Hold feature found in the librarian interface. Many school libraries charge fines for overdue or lost materials, and the Catalog component of Destiny Library Manager can manage those transactions. Fines are searchable by patron name, and the librarian has the option of adding fines, viewing fine history, or waiving fines. Copy and Patron Status is also accessed in this system component. The Copy Status function allows the librarian to add a hold, mark a copy as lost, or print barcodes or spine labels. Patron Status provides instant access to patron information such as user identification numbers, grade level, fine history, hold history, transactions, and statistics. The last function available in the Catalog component is Library Information. The Library Information tab gives a table of current due dates, library statistics including current number of titles in the collection, and lists of patrons that frequently check out materials. Although the Web-based nature of Library Manager is one of the system’s best features, technical difficulties do happen with any online application. Follett Remote is an offline circulation function that allows the library to operate when the school’s Internet connection is experiencing technical issues. Follett Remote is loaded onto the desktop and offline circulation transactions are uploaded to the system at a later time. Through all of these features, circulation data is seamlessly shared with the Catalog component to provide patrons with accurate resource availability or their own account status (Library Manager Participant Guide, 2008, p. 20,21,167,181,289).

The Destiny Library Manager’s Back Office component houses several support functions that are essential to delivering services to patrons. There are six patron functions in this component. The librarian may edit patron information, add patrons, delete patrons, or update groups of patrons in the Back Office. One example of how Destiny Library Manager works seamlessly with other school information systems is the ability the librarian has to upload student photographs from other systems or the school photography service into the patron record. A crucial part of the Back Office is the Library Policy function. The school librarian is able to set circulation policies based on patron and material type. Destiny Library Manager has the capability to create administrator, guest, student, teacher, and patron accounts with varying access levels related to loan periods and fines. The policy function works with the circulation component to provide loan period and fine amounts. The Back Office calendar task manages the school library’s schedule and shares this data with the Circulation component to create due dates and loan periods that do not conflict with holidays or weekends (Library Manager Participant Guide, 2008, p. 254,258).

Librarians must manage an enormous amount of data including circulation rates, collection age, and inventories. The Reports function of the Back Office instantly provides this type of information without any time-consuming data tabulation on the part of the librarian. The Library Materials reports function can create collection statistic reports, bar code labels and lists, spine labels, hold reports, inventory reports, search statistics, shelf lists, and weeding logs. School librarians called upon to create bibliographies may use the Reports function to develop list by title, subject, or call number. Particularly valuable is the Collection Statistics Summary that supplies the age of materials in Dewey Range (Library Manager Participant Guide, 2008, p. 159, 164). This is a powerful collection tool that can guide a school librarian during weeding process or provide the evidence necessary to support budget requests for new materials (Minkel, 2001, p. 31). The Back Office also provides librarians the means to create and print custom reports. Inventories are completed using the Back Office, and librarians have the option to conduct annual or circulation type inventories (Library Manager Participant Guide, 2008, p. 45,47,48).

Most automated school library systems consist only of the Catalog, Circulation, and Administrative components but in the 21st century, a school library must have a presence on the World Wide Web. Follett provides a fully customizable home page with Destiny Library Manager to serve as the gateway to the system. Text, links, and pathfinders are easily added to the Home Page even if the librarian has little web page creation experience. This component can serve as an important marketing tool for the school library, and a creative design can entice students to use the other components of the system (Library Manager Participant Guide, 2008, p. 231).

**Applications within the School Library**

Follett’s Destiny Library Manager is marketed as a “total solution” for library operations, according to Connie Hansen, sales representative for Follett. The system’s application is reflected in how librarians, teachers, and students use it. The impact it has on the librarian is certainly more immediate than it is for teachers and students, due to the nature of the librarian’s job. However, many aspects of Destiny ultimately affect the quality of the library’s collections as well as the ability of students to efficiently access those collections. This, in effect, allows the librarian to support book and information literacy as part of the educational goals of the school system.

Circulation is important to a librarian not only operationally, but also for management data (Schultz-Jones, 2006, p. 50). Circulation supports policies and tracks materials. Fine, loan period, and hold policies are automatically applied to transactions. Fines are calculated for overdue items according to the school policy, for example. Accurate holdings information is maintained by the check-out, check-in, and renewal buttons on the circulation tab, and students’ current checkouts are tracked by their identification card barcodes. With Destiny, the librarian assigns a barcode to each new student, and indicates relevant information, such as a contact teacher (usually for homeroom or English), phone number, and graduation year. Each year, existing students’ information is updated, but their barcodes are retained. Teachers are also assigned a barcode, which is placed on an ID. This component also supports the library’s fine, loan period, and hold policies.

Using Destiny Library Manager, data collection is very easy, and relevant reports can be quickly generated. With a few clicks of the mouse, the librarian can pull up circulation numbers, overdue notices, a list of items checked out to a student or teacher, or the last circulation date of a particular item, among other things (Shultz-Jones, 2006, p. 52). Overdue fine notices are easily generated and can be printed according to students’ English teacher or advisor and placed in the teachers’ mailboxes or emailed directly to the student and/or teacher. The librarian can also obtain a detailed collection analysis report using Title Wise.

One of the built-in features of Destiny is the ability to order items online through their sister company, TITLEWAVE. This feature allows the librarian to build orders over a period of time, and once funds have been secured, to transmit the order electronically with a click of the mouse. If the school participates in the Accelerated Reader program, the librarian can order AR tests to go with the books being ordered. TITLEWAVE automatically shows which books and accelerated reader tests on an order are already in the library’s collection, thus reducing unintentional duplication. Current, previously processed, and future orders are maintained in the database and can be viewed at any time.

Using an intuitive interface based on icons, students are able to do several library operations using Destiny. Because the system is Web-based, they can perform such activities as checking for an item’s availability and placing holds twenty-four hours a day (Library Systems Today, 2001, p. 43). The catalog toolbar can be customized by the librarian for users to perform a basic search for an item by author, subject, keyword, title, call number, or barcode. Additionally, the librarian may enable other types of searches such as Power advanced searching or a visual search. The ability to place holds is also at the discretion of the librarian. Students may also check to see whether the library has an Accelerated Reader test for a particular book, which can be crucial to the decision whether to check out the book or look for another one. They can also open their own records and view fines and/or fees. Since everything is Web-based, parents may also access the above information remotely.

Teachers are able to perform the same activities students, in addition to two others. First, “Destiny enables teachers to create relevant content bibliographies for students to search on specific topics…the librarian can provide a list of applicable resources available in the library” (Cox, 2006, p. 35). Second, the teacher can efficiently dispense and collect textbooks by taking classes to the library for check-in or check-out.

**Strengths**

Follett’s Destiny Library Manager is a valuable system to librarians for many reasons. First, it is convenient. Librarians and patrons easily get access to information relevant to the library’s collection as well as other collections via the Internet. Resources can be easily shared among schools within the district (Breeding, 2005). Because it is Web-based, students and parents may access the system 24/7 to peruse the collection, place or cancel holds, and view fines in the borrower’s record. Second, it is efficient. Circulation transactions are completed quickly for patrons. Librarians can create a class list of patron barcodes to scan for speedy textbook checkout, or students can have their ID’s scanned (Library Systems Today, 2001). Patron and item databases are maintained and updated instantly during a transaction (Schultz-Jones, 2006, p. 27), so that the database reflects reality. Librarian tasks such as generation and distribution of overdue notices, collection analysis, and acquisitions are streamlined to save time. Third, it is effective. Librarians ensure authority control over the collection by importing MARC records from Destiny’s database. Data and reports generated from information in Destiny’s databases can indicate issues that might otherwise go unnoticed (Schultz-Jones, 2006, p. 36). Vendor licensing provided to a single centralized system rather than each school within a district is cost-effective in most circumstances. Fourth, Destiny allows for improved library service. Since Follett’s software is installed on the district’s server, central office technology professionals handle any problems, not the librarian. Because Follett provides training on the system, librarians can maximize the system’s capabilities. As a result, the librarian has more time to connect students with books by through conversation, book talks, and creative programs. Patron confidentiality is assured as the system purges items’ borrowing history. Last, Destiny enables the librarian to focus on information literacy and to support the school’s curriculum. The librarian has more time to teach students how to search in Destiny and how to perform general research and more time for collaborating with teachers to integrate information literacy skills into their lessons and projects. There is also increased opportunity for supporting the curriculum by communicating with teachers about specific resources in the library that are applicable to each teacher’s subject matter.

**Weaknesses**

Although Follett’s Destiny Library Manager has many strengths, no system is perfect. Destiny is relatively expensive to purchase and cannot be purchased in separate modules over time. As a result, small schools and districts may not find it to be feasible. In addition, Follett bought its closest competitor, Sagebrush, in 2006 (Kenney, 2006), setting up a possible monopoly of integrated library resource management systems that could affect pricing and options in the future. Many competitors are going out of business, giving Destiny even more control over the marketplace.

Private and independent schools that do not belong to a district face an additional problem with Destiny. Library Manager is only offered in a district platform, and several functions are either district- or site- specific. Library Manager is configured for one person (a district administrator) to have control over functions such as authority control and subject headings while a Library Administrator would control day to day functions such as check-ins or adding titles. This separation of tasks does not make sense in a single-site school where the same person acts as both Manager and Administrator. Separate log-ins create additional steps and confusion. The lack of a single-site platform also entails additional, lengthy district-level training for single sites that is duplicated during the Library Manager training. This additional training places a burden on single-site librarians. Another related issue is that Follett customer service and training are unaccustomed to managing single sites and have difficulty customizing Library Manager for one school.

Small, technical issues continue to irk users. For instance, Destiny calculates fines but does not offer change-calculating function. As a result, if a student does not provide exact change, the librarian must make change either mentally or by using a calculator, both of which make the transaction more vulnerable to mistakes. Second, patrons who would like to track their reading history, usually for AR testing purposes, are not able to because Destiny purges a borrower’s record of checkouts once the books are returned. Another problem for libraries on a manual check-out system involves the system-produced labels. When one prints labels for pockets and cards, it pulls information from the c subfield of the 245 “title” tag. The c subfield lists the statement of responsibility for the item, and depending on the number of authors, this statement can run several lines, taking up the entire space on the label. With films, responsible parties include the studio, producers, and many other parties. Rarely is there room left for the title of the film. Books with multiple authors and editors are troublesome as well. This problem has been reported to Follett but without result. Finally, Follett’s book processing service does not allow adequate customization for personal preferences.

**User Perceptions**

Eight high-school students who were first-time users of Destiny’s OPAC completed a survey about their perceptions of its usability. Of those students, only three thought that the school’s Destiny homepage clearly indicated how to proceed in order to perform a search for a book in the online catalog. Once they understood how to search, all participants responded that it was easy to find a book by searching by title or author and that it was also easy to check an item for availability. Each student found the graphics to be clear and clean as well. None of the students, however, thought the help function was clearly labeled. This information clearly indicates a need for Follett to examine its OPAC interface and make it more intuitive, especially for new end-users.

Two English teachers were surveyed about the OPAC and Circulation components as it pertains to teacher activities. Both reported that textbooks could be tracked easily by student name. Both also agreed that it was easy to determine fees owed by a student, but they were not sure how to print out a report. Neither were the teachers aware of the ability to produce research topic bibliographies in Destiny. Since the above-mentioned functions are beneficial to teachers yet underutilized, a brief in-service for the faculty by the media center specialist is warranted in order to give awareness and understanding of what Destiny can do for them.

Three librarians were interviewed to discuss their perceptions of Follett’s Destiny Library Manager. All three have used this system for three years to manage library books, textbooks, and technology equipment. Two of the respondents found Destiny to be better than the previous automation system used, mainly due to periodic upgrades from Follett that change or add features to make it more user-friendly. (The third respondent had only been a librarian for three years.) None of the respondents found the previous system to have any advantages. When asked about Destiny’s effect on their ability to deliver quality library service, two respondents pointed to the multi-level searching capabilities of the OPAC. The third believed that Destiny enabled her to work quickly and efficiently, allowing her more time for quality instruction. All three respondents listed Destiny’s strengths as its ease of use, efficiency, and Web-based format. When asked about weaknesses, one noted the “fine” system requires her to calculate her own change. Another respondent did not like that the Circulation component’s check-in display only lists the last ten check-ins. The third respondent said that students sometimes would like to have a list of the books they have previously checked out for Accelerated Reader purposes, but this system does not allow for it. Overall, the participants perceived Destiny to be a user-friendly system with good customer service. Each respondent gave Destiny a rating of four (“mostly satisfied”) on a scale of zero to five, with zero being “completely dissatisfied” and five being “completely satisfied”, indicating that there is room for improvement.

**Future Trends**

Marshall Breeding, in his April, 2008 article for the annual “Automation Marketplace” column, describes emerging technologies and how they will influence school library automation systems of the future. More than ever, the focus will shift to the patron’s experience, transcending traditional automation functions to become a one-stop solution for students, teachers, and administrators. Vendors are building systems that will rival popular web destinations; users can expect upgraded graphic design, faceted navigation, and relevancy ranked search results. OPACs will offer federated searches and Web 2.0 elements such as RSS feeds, user tags, and patron-submitted reviews. Patrons and librarians will be able to customize their interfaces to create a more personally useful system. Another trend Breeding noted is the ongoing move to district-wide instead of single site systems (Breeding, 2008, p. 32-37).

In this rapidly changing environment Follett has kept pace by frequently updating its products. The newest version of Destiny Library Manager, 9.0, will be available to download in November of this year. In a telephone interview with Follett sales representative Debra Kusz on November 17, 2008, Ms. Kusz explained that this latest upgrade allows students to create user names and passwords so that they may customize their interface, view their past borrowing history and associated fines, renew materials, place holds, and write reviews of items to share with other patrons.

Federated searching is now available by annual subscription to OneSearch. This product allows OPACs to display information pulled from both free and paid databases along with title records of locally available materials. While OneSearch is not compatible with all subscription databases, it works with many well-known, school-oriented vendors. For example, OneSearch does not incorporate articles and images available from the Carnegie-Mellon Foundation’s Jstor and ARTstor, but it will integrate materials from Ebsco, Proquest, HW Wilson and many other vendors’ databases. Librarians may choose to include widely-available information from Google and Wikipedia, or they may keep the service selective, by limiting it to only a few trusted sources.

**Conclusion**

With school automation systems, luxuries of the past have become necessities today. While twenty years ago “stand-alone” meant a system with unrelated modules, and “integrated” denoted a common database, today literature often uses the same terms to refer to site-specific PC systems rather than networked ones, and those that offer federated searches beyond the traditional catalog-bound ones. Follett’s Destiny Library Manager has thrived in the automation marketplace by remaining responsive to patron desires and adaptive to their needs. Their proactive development of automation systems is reflected in their numerous offerings. The basic Web-based automation system provides customization and additional features far surpassing the needs of many school libraries. In addition, customers can purchase annual subscriptions to additional benefits, such as OneSearch, and WebPath Express. Finally, they can buy their materials through TITLEWAVE. In this way, Follett has produced a product that can be relied upon as a “total solution” for school library needs. It is virtually unnecessary for librarians to use anyone else.

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