A Modern Solution Can Transform Library Management

A Customer Conversation:
Hongik University's Adoption of Alma

We had the opportunity to talk with **Jaewan Jo**, IT Service, Library Facility Management, at Hongik University library about the library's transition to Alma.

The conversation provides valuable insights into the challenges the library faced prior to Alma, the decision-making process, and the tangible benefits achieved, such as improved efficiency, enhanced security, and a better user experience. It highlights the importance of modernizing library services to meet evolving needs.

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Let's start out with an easy question, what's your background in libraries and tell me about your role at Hongik University?

The Hongik University Library aims to be a core reading, cultural, and learning support organization in the university with rich academic resources and a convenient information environment, and aims to be a space of communication and collaboration full of creativity that can satisfy the needs of Hongik people who pursue passion and expertise. I am in charge of library computerization, thesis and dissertation, research performance management, and library facility improvement at Hongik University Central Library.

What was the situation like at the library when you selected Alma?

We selected Alma and went live in July 2024. At the time, our university library faced numerous challenges with its existing library management system, prompting the decision to adopt Alma. a cloud-based library services platform. Internally, the decision to adopt Alma was influenced by several factors.

There was also a growing interest in modern, cloud-based solutions within the library staff. The move to a cloud-based system would mean that we wouldn't have to host a system ourselves and the physical server room could be used for other purposes. Also, we had some staff retire and we decided it would make most sense to transition to a more efficient system at that time.

Why Alma? What were some of the reasons for choosing it?

As I mentioned, the cloud-based nature of Alma was very appealing. It reduces the burden of server maintenance and provided automatic monthly updates, ensuring the system remains current with the latest features. This is just a foundation for the service though.

A key aspect not available in our solutions, that was critical to our decision, is that Alma has the unique ability to unify the management of print, electronic, and digital materials into one system. Additionally, we looked to Alma's powerful analytics tools as an opportunity to provide data-driven decision-making.
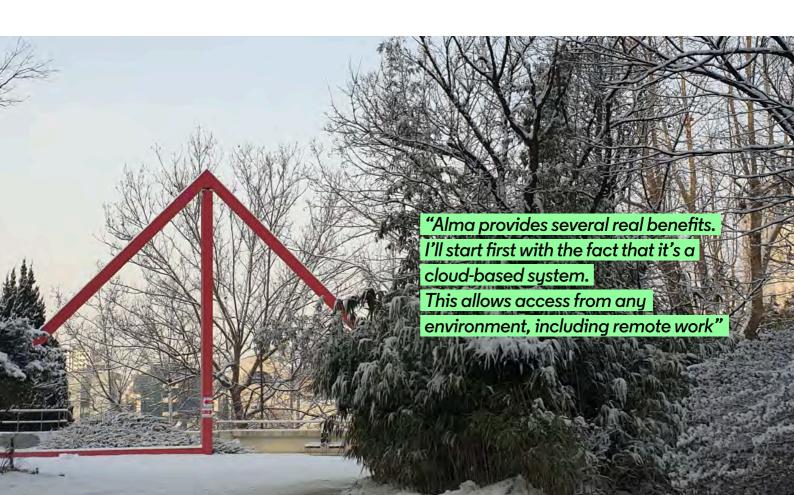
Were there any significant challenges that Alma needed to immediately address?

Yes. We really needed to upgrade the library server and our library's homepage due to security issues, and frequent server restarts, which often frustrated users.

What was the adoption process like?

The preparation for adopting Alma involved several steps. Of course, we first put our implementation team together and then gathered the necessary resource and to support awareness and education. Then held multiple staff meetings and trainings. Data cleanup was also needed, as we had to address incorrectly entered data within existing systems.

"Alma provides several real benefits. I'll start first with the fact that it's a cloud-based system. This allows access from any environment, including remote work"

Were there any concerns during implementation?

Any migration has challenges, and it takes patience to transition to a new system. Problems with handling embedded data and intercampus borrowing arose, along with issues with the school's security level. There were also concerns about system linking, data loss, and customization.

In the end, everything worked out and was addressed. For myself, at some point realized I had to believe in the system to avoid becoming a "sinner of history."

Now that you and your colleagues are using Alma, reflect on some of the value it's provided?

Alma provides several real benefits. I'll start first with the fact that it's a cloud-based system. This allows access from any environment, including remote work. This flexibility was particularly valuable during the pandemic, enabling staff to work from home without disruption. The cloud-based system facilitates seamless integration with other Clarivate solutions, streamlining workflows and improving efficiency. We use it with Primo for academic search, so it enhances our library services.

About Hongik University (S. Korea)

Hongik University Central Library supports the university's educational and research goals and activities through the sharing and dissemination of information. It holds approximately 1.4 million domestic and foreign books, serials, and audiovisual materials, while subscribing to 70,000 academic journals, e-journals, and web DBs. In addition to access to books and materials, the Library provides a variety of services to members of Hongik University, including use of reading and study rooms, research and learning support services, user education, and cultural events.

Anything else that comes to mind?

There are a couple of improvement I want to highlight too. The system's powerful analytics tools enable the library to make data-driven decisions, enhancing collection development and resource allocation. The Alma API solved many of our problems, ensuring staff could fully leverage the system's capabilities.

Additionally, both Alma and Primo's user-friendly and intuitive interfaces have improved the overall user experience for both staff and patrons.

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In conclusion, how would you summarize the adoption of Alma?

Alma is a good fit for our environment and addresses our needs. At the time, it provided a modern, cloud-based solution that addressed many of the challenges faced by the library. Now, the transition means even more, as the need for a new library system in the age of artificial intelligence is necessary for library success. As I look at it today, our successful implementation of Alma has positioned our library to better serve the needs of our academic community, now and in the future.

→ **Learn more about Alma**

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