

How libraries are creating new and powerful user experiences

Academic libraries are using Ex Libris solutions to meet evolving user needs, align services to support their long-term strategy and empower academic achievement



In 1985, as Gen X and Millennials watched Muppet Babies and played Donkey Kong, university researchers published an article in the *Journal of Marketing Research* on service quality that maintains relevance today. The authors concluded, “**...expected service – a critical component or perceived service quality...is shaped by word-of-mouth communications, personal needs, and past experience.**” In other words, user expectations deeply influence their perception of a service.

Why is this observation important in 2023? According to the Web of Science™, the *Journal of Marketing Research* article has been cited more than 4,000 times in respected journals like Knowledge Management in Organizations because the concepts for evaluating service quality continue to be relevant 40 years later.

The children of Gen X and Millennials, now teens and young adults, are evaluating the quality of online services available through higher education institutions. Studies of students’ acceptance and use of technology in higher education show they are deeply influenced by their perception of ease of use and practical application. Teens and young adults grew up using Netflix, Amazon, Google and Instagram. They expect the apps at their university to be just as intuitive.



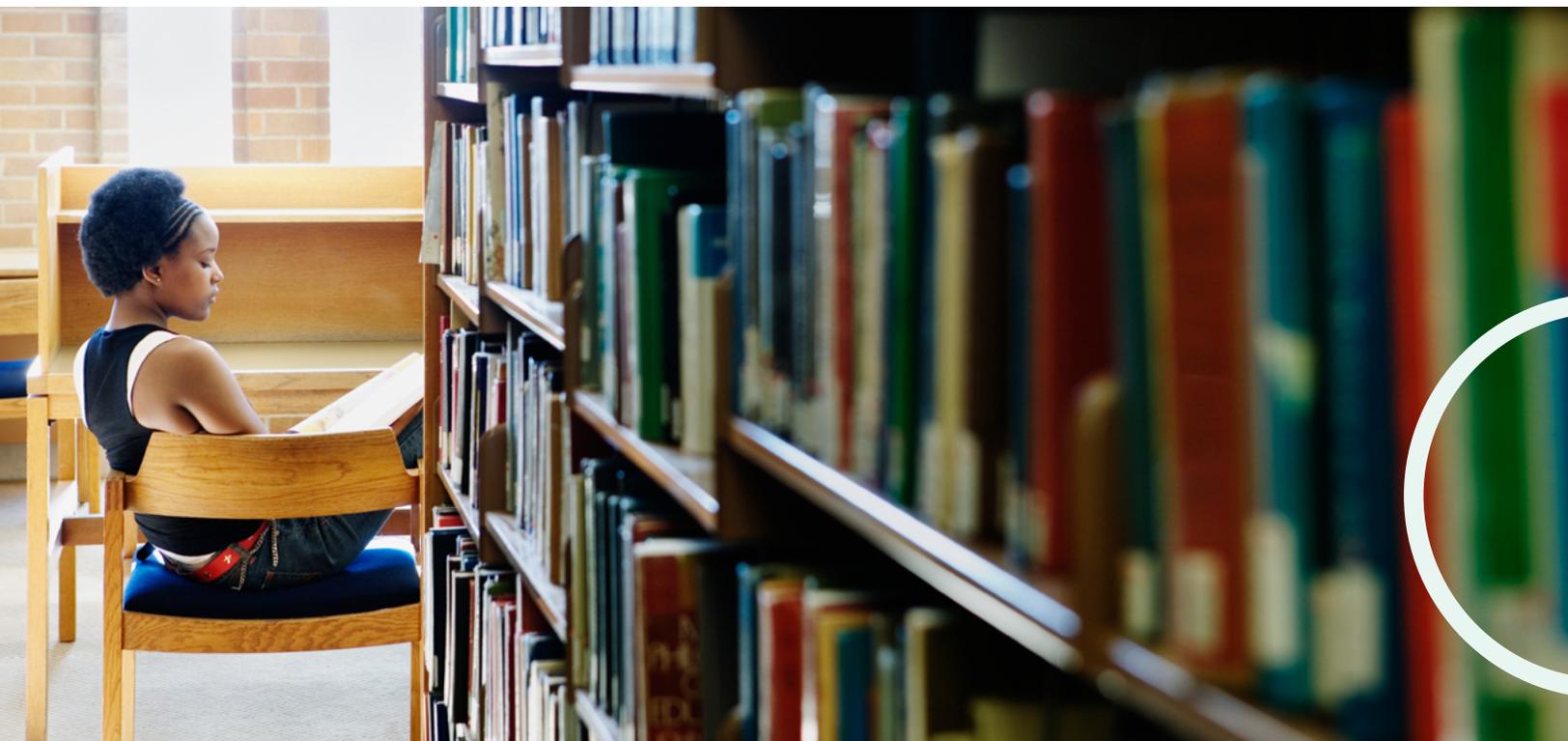
Meeting abrupt changes in user expectations

The importance of incorporating digital technology into higher education was well known before 2020 even if actual use was inconsistent across institutions. Then Covid-19 disrupted teaching, learning and life on campus. The lecture halls fell silent, and students and researchers shifted to online learning at home.

While the library building went dark, academic librarians worked doubly hard to implement new online services. Those with the Alma library management system from Ex Libris, part of Clarivate™, had the advantage of being able to provide new services very quickly. Among them is the Hunt Library at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Florida.

“Ironically, the pandemic forced us to increase services to our Worldwide Campus users because we wanted to level the services to all our users regardless of their location,” said **James Day, Assistant Director for Electronic Library Services at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University**. “Pre-pandemic our Worldwide users did not have user accounts in Alma or Primo [discovery service]. Library staff had to mediate all the transactions for Worldwide users. We worked with our IT department to get all the Worldwide users loaded into Alma. That leveled the playing field and now they can all access their My Account in Primo on their own.”

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Continuing the digital transformation

Alma and Primo played an important role in the expansion of services at the University of Windsor, Ontario, Canada during the Covid-19 closures with quick implementation of conveniences like contactless pick up anywhere and return anywhere for all physical materials. Now, post-pandemic, it continues to improve library service with Alma as its base.

“In 2021, we began implementing an Alma fulfillment network for universal borrowing and return with shared borrowing and patron policies, said **Pascal Calarco, Systems Librarian and Scholarly Communications Librarian/Liaison Librarian, Economics, University of Windsor**. “That has also extended to build out other Alma resources sharing agreements with other Canadian Alma and Primo libraries outside of Ontario.”



The game-changing experience of a library app

Librarians at the University of Salford, near Manchester, United Kingdom, serve a large commuter population and use an Ex Libris library app to make it easy for students, researchers and staff to connect with library services. Online seat bookings enable students to reserve a desk before they even reach the campus, right from the app. “The feedback we got from the students was that they really liked having a desk waiting for them when they got on campus,” said **Angela Walker, Digital Library Manager, University of Salford**. About 50% of the library’s study space is bookable through a tile on the app. According to Walker, it’s one of the most used tiles on the app and so successful that it was expanded to include a special view for staff to book a workspace, making the library’s agile work environment more convenient for staff.

In addition to having Alma and Primo represented within the app, University of Salford also includes a tile for borrowing laptops. “Another key thing that became really apparent when we moved online during the pandemic – a lot of our users didn’t have access to the equipment to join our online lectures,” said Walker. “We had a number of laptops, about 100, we circulated. They’re all in Alma. We ended up increasing the number of laptops that we had available for users to borrow to over 700.”

To simplify borrowing laptops the library maintains records in Alma and circulates them using self-service lockers throughout the campus. The tile in the app quickly tells students where to find a laptop, rather than having to “wander around campus to see if one is available,” added Walker.

“It has been a real game changer because once students log in they get all of the core services. It’s sort of a one-stop-shop. The whole architecture is really important for us in supporting the user experience across the different systems.”

Angela Walker
Digital Library Manager, University of Salford



Unifying for simplicity and functionality

Developing a one-stop shop approach to library services has attracted many libraries to Ex Libris solutions. At **Washington State University, Blake Galbreath, Core Services Librarian**, described a key part of the library's technology acquisition strategy, "Every time we add a product or application, we make sure that it provides more of a one-stop shop or consolidation of services either for the patron or for our staff."

At Washington State, the Leganto course resource list solution works seamlessly with Alma, Primo and the Learning Management Solution (LMS), providing students, faculty and staff with a unified experience. According to Galbreath, Leganto solved a variety of challenges. "Leganto allowed us to introduce 'Single Sign-On' so it allowed for SAML authentication. It also just worked seamlessly into whatever LMS you were using at the time. We were using Blackboard and then switched to Canvas. It also had the added advantage of LTI [Learning Tools Interoperability], so we've introduced some aspects of that as well. It also combines electronic resources and print resources together for course reserves, which was a bit of a problem before Leganto."

Unifying library services is a priority at Embry-Riddle as well. "As everyone knows, library users are accustomed to modern technology platforms outside the library field and they expect the same level of simplicity and functionality," said Day. "So, we're using Alma and Primo now as the base from which we are building an integrated service to attempt to attain this one stop focus."

Embry-Riddle's Hunt Library has plans to build on Alma and Primo even further, bringing additional services into a unified environment, including the Rapido resource sharing system. Completely integrated with the discovery interface, Rapido lets students borrow titles in two clicks on the library website and easily track delivery. Day said, "Because Rapido is integrated into Alma and Primo users will be able to view the interlibrary loan request right in their My Account. So, this satisfied our one stop criteria."

Adding Rapido brings the Hunt Library closer to its strategic priorities. "A one-stop place for resources and leveling access between our resident students and our distance learning students," continued Day.

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Assistant Director for Electronic Library Services at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University

New library services help drive institutional success

The impact of digital services implemented to maintain library access during the 2020 pandemic shutdowns, and continued after buildings opened, is more than anecdotal.

At the **University of Windsor, Calarco** acknowledged that, “The largest impact has been implementing the Alma fulfillment network across the consortia. It kind of blurs circulation and interlibrary loan. That has resulted in several hundred percent more interlibrary loan traffic as people are able to see holdings from other universities in our shared Primo discovery system.”

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At the **University of Salford**, Library Mobile simplified access to library services for students and faculty as well as a new tool for departments outside the library. Walker remarked, “We’ve gotten really positive feedback from the academics. When we launched it, we had Tweets from our academic staff saying, ‘This is so much easier than using the library website, fantastic!’ And what we also did went beyond the library. Because we don’t have an institutional app, we utilize Library Mobile to possibly fill gaps where it wasn’t being picked up across the institution.”

Filling institutional service gaps at the University of Salford demonstrates the impact new library services with a one-stop shop focus can have beyond the library and increases the visibility of the library.

Walker offers a recommendation for all libraries positioning themselves as an integral part of institutional success, “As an institution, as a library service, everything that we do tails back to our institutional strategy, our university strategy. So, we need to make sure that when we are implementing solutions and systems that they are supporting the core pillars of that strategy – enabling our researchers and students to be successful – and connecting them with content, making things simple, removing the barriers for them to study and actually get through their degree or research project and at the end of it be successful.”

References

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