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Acquisitions '91

Conference on

**ACQUISITIONS,
BUDGETS,
AND
COLLECTIONS**

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Theme:
Acquisitions or access?

Compiled and Edited by
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The Dynix Acquisitions Module Evaluated
in an Academic Library

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The Dynix Acquisitions Module Evaluated in an Academic Library

Introduction

Dynix is one of the fastest growing companies in the library automation field and its public catalog module has been a great success. The Acquisitions module available from Dynix is not as widely used as its public catalog. This is a review of the merits of the Acquisitions module from an academic librarian's point of view.

The Dynix system was purchased by St. Mary's University Academic Library at a time when many of the modules such as acquisitions, serials control, and reserve had not yet been produced. This meant that the library purchased these modules on the strength of the public catalog module which is a superior product: simple and easy to use.

Evaluation of a library automation system or subsystem should address both the needs of the library and the ease of use of the system. The perfect system does not exist and no system suits everyone's needs. Nevertheless, model checklists and procurement forms have been produced which help the librarian compare and evaluate systems in terms of what processes can be done on the system (1, 2). But even these do not help evaluate the ease of use of a system. Different systems may have the ability to do the same activity, though one may require a hundred keystrokes and the other ten to perform the same job. This is something that does not show up on a checklist or RFP. In looking at the Dynix Acquisitions module, I will review its abilities, flexibility, and ease of use.

Security

The Dynix Acquisitions module has multiple levels of password security with each succeeding level able to do all operations of those below it plus further operations. At any level of security, some changes in records can be made. No level is available for only "viewing" acquisitions records without changing them. This ability would be helpful for subject bibliographers who need to be aware of what funds are available but who are not authorized to do acquisitions work.

The Dynix Acquisitions module is part of a system of modules that work together in the library. Each module in the system is sealed off as much as possible from the others for security reasons but this makes work difficult at times. The Acquisitions module has no access to the tools for editing bibliographic records even though Acquisitions is able to add and delete these records. This means that when a record is typed or loaded into the system with an error, the only option within the Acquisitions module is to delete it and add it again. There also seems to be a bug in the delete command for Acquisitions since the record is not completely deleted from the system when this is invoked. No corrections to bibliographic records are possible without exiting Acquisitions and entering the Cataloging module.

The integrity of the bibliographic database and the integrity of the accounting trail must be protected, however, the ability to add and delete records for ordering would seem to imply the ability to edit them. Security should be maintained through the use of multi-level passwords and the use of trails and logs to track usage and funds. Security should not and cannot be maintained by making necessary work difficult or impossible to accomplish.

Ordering

Firm orders, open orders, prepaid orders, and deposit account orders are options on the module, though firm ordering is the only one which is working appropriately for our purposes. Bibliographic information for ordering can be manually typed directly into the database or downloaded from OCLC or Bibliofile. The remainder of the acquisitions information is then appended to the bibliographic information. There are default patterns which can be set up for commonly used ordering information and these are very convenient and useful. Standard blank workforms for entering orders as well as invoices and vendors are available.

The operator is alerted during ordering when an account is nearing zero or is overencumbered but is not told exactly what the budget is at that time. One must exit the order and call up the individual fund to see the full fund information. It would be more convenient if the details of the fund were given instead of just a warning during the ordering process. The system makes no distinction whether a fund is nearing its limit or is far

past it when issuing a warning, so a look at the balance is necessary before continuing.

The open order option on the module used to pay for standing orders or subscriptions has caused problems in our experience. Some of the problems we have encountered include negative encumbrances being generated by payments on standing orders, the inability to close and delete incorrect standing orders, and the inability to generate reports with titles for standing orders. Also, the open order option does not allow the library to generate an open order or to encumber money for it, it only allows payments to be made. It would be more useful if the system allowed the library to generate a purchase order for an open order and to encumber money for these orders. Lacking this, we must keep track of these items on a separate system.

Prepaid orders have caused fund accounting problems on the system in that due to a flaw, prepays are never completed by the system. In the words of Dynix, they are never "paid complete." When certain options are invoked the system can act unpredictably on prepaid orders since it treats completed and uncompleted orders differently.

Access points for searching for orders include order number, purchase order number, ISBN, barcode number, LC number, title, author, title keyword, and others which are sufficient for this task. Series access can be difficult since the screen truncates the series title and if the series name is long, the series number is cut off. Also, it would be helpful if the series were presented by the system in numerical order.

It is possible to place orders online to one book jobber and download their acknowledgements into Dynix. We have been told that other vendors are being considered for online ordering by Dynix. Of course, many vendors accept electronic orders but not all will accept orders built on the Dynix system. Paper copies of purchase orders can be printed out and mailed to vendors or publishers.

Dynix treats orders exactly like items which are already in the collection by issuing bibliographic numbers and giving them holdings. This seems theoretically unsound since an order is obviously not a "holding" in the library. In fact, we may have to place two or three orders before we actually have a book in hand. Or, the item may never arrive at all despite several orders. Figure 1 gives an example of a holdings record for a title on order in the system.

```
27 MAR 91          ST. MARY'S UNIV. ACADEMIC LIBRARY          10:19AM
                   ACQUISITIONS

Author  BURROUGH, BRYAN
Title  BARBARIANS AT THE GATE : THE FALL OF RJR NABISCO      Holds:  0

#  CALL #                STATUS          BARCODE          LIB
1. THIRD FLOOR           On Order          -55796           SM

Choose a command :
Commands:  SO = Start Over, B = Back, S = Select, ? = Help
```

Fig. 1. A holdings record for a title on order on the Dynix system. The Dynix system creates a "holding" for an order record although there is no real "holding" in the library for the item.

All of this acquisitions activity causes the database to get "dirty" and it is difficult to clean up since acquisitions records must be retained for some time for statistical purposes and in case payment problems occur. Ideally, orders in the catalog should be represented in a way different from the way an actual holding is represented. Each holding must be manually upgraded or deleted from the catalog individually when no longer needed. There is a global purge for older unneeded acquisitions records but it does not affect holdings records.

Figure 2 gives an example of the holdings record for an item which has been received and cataloged on the system. The cataloger must manually upgrade the original holdings record or delete it in order to avoid having two holdings records for each item. Neither is an easy process. In addition, deleting the original holdings record destroys the acquisitions link to the bibliographic record making acquisitions information on the item almost inaccessible so deletion of the holdings record is a poor choice. An automatic upgrade of holdings during cataloging would be welcome. Alternatively, representing orders in the catalog without giving them holdings records would be more theoretically sound.

A note field for local notes is available on the order record, however, the order screen initially shows only a part of the notes attached to the order. Calling up the notes line shows all notes attached but it is not immediately obvious that there are more notes to be seen. Showing the full notes line without extra steps involved would be better. The fund line also must be called up separately from the order record. Ideally, this important information which includes the fund name and amount encumbered would be available from the first order screen without additional steps.

It is possible, in fact mandatory, that a vendor directory be built and used for ordering. Information in the vendor file includes name, address, phone number, discount rate, and other data. Vendors are given sequential numerical codes by the module and it is necessary to enter this numerical code when ordering. The ability to download vendor information from OCLC's Name-Address Directory would be welcome but is not possible.


```
27 MAR 91          ST. MARY'S UNIV. ACADEMIC LIBRARY          10:20AM
                   ACQUISITIONS

Author  Palliser, Charles.
Title   The Quincunx /                                         Holds:  0

#   CALL #           STATUS           BARCODE           LIB
1.  2D FLOOR LEISURE  checked In       001753372         SM
   PR6066.A43 Q85 1990
2.  THIRD FLOOR      Just Received    -54258            SM
   PR6066.A43 Q85 1990

Choose a command :
Commands:  SO = Start Over, B = Back, S = Select, ? = Help
```

Fig. 2. A holdings record for an item received and cataloged on the Dynix system without manually upgrading or deleting the Acquisitions holdings record. An automatic upgrade of holdings or a different method of representing orders in the catalog would be welcome.

Fund Accounting

Fund accounting on Dynix is possible through the use of the hierarchical fund structure. Funds are automatically encumbered when orders are placed and disencumbered when payment is made on firm orders. Prepays are not handled well by the system and no encumbrance is possible on open orders. Deposit accounts are shown as immediately expended on the system and no further funds can be added to deposit accounts once they are in the system.

The system allows the user to build a hierarchical budget, which in our case we have done by subject area. Fiscal year end budget turnover is a relatively easy procedure though there is no way to correct the process if the rollover is in error. An option lets you carry encumbrances over from the previous year or not depending on your local accounting procedures. Also, the operator must be ready to complete the full new budget at a sitting since the budget rollover program cannot be exited until the new budget is balanced.

Discounts can be entered for individual vendors when setting up the vendor directory, however, the system depends on the history of discounts given by the vendor rather than discount noted in the vendor information. This can cause problems when the price input on the order record is incorrect since it is this price compared to the invoiced price that determines the discount on the system. We sometimes rely on incorrect prices from Books in Print or have to estimate prices and this results in an incorrect vendor discount history. An override of this function to keep a specific discount for some vendors would be an improvement toward getting correct encumbrance amounts, particularly on vendors where there is a contractual obligation to provide a specific discount.

The system shows total fund amount, amount encumbered, amount paid out, and the free balance for each individual fund online. Funds can be merged, but once merged, can never be separated again. Funds can be overencumbered if necessary though the operator is warned against this by the system. The manual indicates that funds cannot be overexpended but we have not found that to be strictly true. Funds can be overexpended if they have been overencumbered, however, they cannot be overexpended for open orders which cannot be encumbered.

A list of foreign currency conversions is available

but must be updated regularly to be of use. This is something we have not had the opportunity to examine closely since we normally convert foreign currencies manually to U.S. dollars. Our foreign ordering is rare enough that it is more trouble to consistently update the entire online currency conversion table than to occasionally convert offline whatever currency is needed.

Fund accounts can be credited if necessary except for deposit accounts. These cannot be credited once they are set up. Some improvement here would seem necessary since funds do sometimes need to be added to deposit accounts as more orders are sent to the vendor. Deposit accounts also are not able to show outstanding orders encumbered since all money in the account is immediately shown as expended. This inhibits the usefulness of the deposit account option.

Receiving/Paying

Receiving a book is a somewhat lengthy process since receiving and paying are separate processes done from separate menus and the operator must enter a password for each book received. Mistakes in receiving cannot be corrected and this can also cause problems since the item, once received, cannot even be cancelled and re-entered. See Figure 3 for the warning screen presenting to the operator. Presumably this is the reason for the cumbersome process of receiving. Making the work harder and more lengthy is not a substitute for being able to correct errors.

If the price or quantity changes on an order, this information cannot be corrected on the original order except that an incomplete order can be received. Any change in the order's price, fund, or other parameter requires that the order be cancelled and re-entered with the changes. The system requires that the item be received before payment can be made and this is one reason that prepayment options on the system do not work properly.

After being received, each item must be paid. The operator must be careful not to skip an invoice item or try to pay for an item which has not yet been received. Both these errors will cause problems which are difficult to track down and difficult to correct. Shipping, handling, postage and additional charges are automatically distributed over all funds used on an invoice.

If an error is made in payment of an invoice, it

27 MAR 91 ST. MARY'S UNIV. ACADEMIC LIBRARY 10:24AM
ACQUISITIONS

Item Receiving

WARNING!!!

Be very careful to receive items on the correct Order.
So many files and records are affected that mistakes
are extremely difficult to unravel!

Enter your Receiver Code

Fig. 3. The Dynix Acquisitions module screen which warns the operator against making receiving errors since they cannot be corrected.

cannot be corrected. The entire invoice must be cancelled and reentered. After payment, a voucher can be printed which totals the amounts spent out of each fund and gives a list of titles paid. These must be printed if they are to be used since they are not available for viewing online. They must also be deleted after printing since the print command prints all vouchers available. Making these vouchers available online or having the ability to print only selected vouchers would be preferable.

Order and payment information is retained by the system for mass purging at a later date at the option of the operator, however only the acquisitions data are purged. Any holdings records which link the acquisitions record to the bibliographic record remain with the bibliographic records as noted earlier.

Claims

A claiming time limit must be entered for each order and the system keeps track of when the limit has been reached for each order. Claims can be printed automatically or individual claims can be reviewed before printing. The claim forms generated leave something to be desired since they contain only the order number assigned by Dynix, a short title and the number of copies ordered.

Since the vendors we work with generally like to have an ISBN (if available), the author, full title, purchase order number and the date of the original order to service claims, the claim form generated by Dynix is insufficient for our needs on orders which are already a problem. When used, the claim forms have generated more problems for us with vendor questions than they solved, particularly if the original order was lost by the vendor.

Claims can also be forced if the time limit is not yet expired but a claim is necessary. When a claim is processed, the order information is automatically updated with the claim notice. After the third claim, the system sets the order to "review for cancellation" and after review, cancellation notices can be printed. However, like claims, cancellation notices only contain the Dynix order number and short title of the item. Claims and cancellations are printed in batches and single claims or cancellations cannot be selected for individual printing.

Interfaces

The Acquisitions module is able to build electronic purchase orders which can be accepted by Baker & Taylor and electronic acknowledgements from Baker & Taylor can be downloaded into the Acquisitions records. Dynix is able to accept Marc records uploaded from Bibliofile and OCLC for cataloging purposes and acquisitions purposes. We would like to see a wider range of options in the area of interfaces, both for downloading bibliographic records and for electronic ordering.

Management Reports

The management reports available on Dynix are fairly primitive. The most useful and complete seems to be the Report of Fund Status which shows the fund name and account number, the original budget, the amounts encumbered and expended and the free balances. The New Titles List is useful as a list of titles received, sorted alphabetically by title. It gives title, author, imprint and number of copies received. No financial information is available on this report. The Report of Fund Log lists every transaction in the fund account and is useful as an audit trail and for tracking down obscure fund accounting problems but is not meant to be used as a daily management tool.

Monthly summaries are available for each fund, however these must be requested and printed individually for each fund and no titles or funds balances are included in these reports, only monthly totals for encumbrances and expenditures. Figure 4 shows an example of this report. There is no option for printing the monthly summaries of all funds with one command which would be more convenient.

The Vendor Reports give fill rates, percent fill, claims, and a list of outstanding orders with price and status. Fill time and percent fill seem to be calculated oddly. On reports generated for our two main vendors, there was a fill time of 0 days on one and on the other a fill time of 1 day. The percent fill was calculated as 207% on one. This was not counting copies since we rarely order more than one copy. We have not been able to make much use of the Vendor Reports due to these problems. The other reports have problems which render them less than useful as management tools. The systems administrator can make use of the RECALL programming language to design other specialized reports.

Fund Account - Activity by Month

LIBRARY BUDGET FY 1990-91 KLEINE
Current Year

	Encumbered	Expended	Titles Received	Items Received
	-----	-----	-----	-----
Jan.	125.17	162.94	7	7
Feb.	48.21	102.94	6	6
Mar.	59.71	90.46	3	3
Apr.				
May				
Jun.				
Jul.	3970.56	437.39	27	27
Aug.	116.21	1072.49	79	79
Sep.	34.45	1087.68	37	37
Oct.		625.32	34	34
Nov.	67.09	285.49	21	21
Dec.	7.26	30.79	1	1

The end of a form, Press <RETURN>

Fig. 4. A monthly report for a fund account generated by the Dynix Acquisitions module. Total budgeted amount in the fund and free balance remaining each month would be a welcome addition to this report as would a total of titles and items received.

Ease of Use

Overall, the Dynix Acquisitions module is fairly difficult to use. Training is available from Dynix for a fee and helpful manuals are now available (4, 5). There is a test module available for Acquisitions which enables the operator to try unknown or risky operations before using them in the regular Acquisitions module. This can be useful particularly for testing operations which cannot be reversed or altered once they have been accomplished.

Dynix has been somewhat inflexible in making changes requested by the Acquisitions users group of Dynix. Dynix Acquisitions users recently voted on enhancements to the system and two of the top three were noted by Dynix to be "potentially very difficult" and no indication was given that they would be ever be implemented. A new release of the module (number 135) is due this summer in which Dynix has promised improvements to some of the problems noted here. In the future, it is hoped that Dynix would implement more of the enhancements requested by its Acquisitions users. Overall, customer service for the module has been poor in our experience.

Conclusions

Aside from the poor software support for the Acquisitions module, the overriding problem we have noted is that it is built to assume that no one will ever make a mistake. In order to correct an error, one must almost always cancel and redo the entire procedure, no matter how lengthy. Sometimes, as in receiving or budget rollover, mistakes cannot be corrected at all. Even if the Dynix user were so fortunate as to never make a mistake, book vendors and publishers do. Dynix does not make allowances for this.

Overall, the Dynix Acquisitions module leaves much to be desired in terms of ability, ease of use, software support, customer service and flexibility. Two systems on the market right now which seem to be superior in ease of use and flexibility are Innovacq by Innovative Interfaces and Acq350 by Ameritech. Both systems seem to have most of the features Dynix is lacking plus, the Acq350 in particular has a very useful and accessible reporting system (3). We have not had the opportunity to look at every Acquisitions system on the market in making this judgement, however we have tried to examine every one which

is appropriate for our library. And, of course, the ease of use and customer service aspects of any system cannot be judged until after one has purchased the system and used it for a length of time.

In summary, the Dynix Acquisitions module in its present form cannot be recommended for use. Some of the problems we have had with the module are due to our own peculiarities as a library and, of course, every library is somewhat different. It would seem that a great deal of flexibility should be built into an acquisitions system, particularly since libraries are often dependent upon parent institutions for ordering and payment guidelines and rules. But, in addition to its other shortcomings, the Dynix system makes little allowance for differing rules and procedures which are naturally a part of the acquisitions process in libraries.

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