

Library Technology Report: RapidILL for University Library

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Bob Bennhoff

Rachel Hammer, Samantha Shandy, and Janine White

For this academic library, RapidILL is an excellent solution for interlibrary loans (ILL). This program currently serves over 330 institutions, demonstrating its usability and strength (MENA Report, 2020). With so many institutions at play, odds are that resources will be acquirable for students, staff, and educators. RapidILL focuses on limiting staff time spent searching for items, according to each document viewed in preparation for this request. The call number for the book or journal are included on the request when received, so the items are easy to locate. While it does take time on the front end to submit the call numbers for this library's holdings, the time saved later far outweighs the time spent. RapidILL uses "Ariel, Odyssey, or RapidILL's own RapidX file uploading service" (MacWaters, 2013). This variety ensures that RapidILL is compatible with a library's own, existing systems. Additionally, according to ExLibris Ltd. (2019), RapidILL can integrate with Alma, ILLiad, Cleo, Tipasa and RelaisILL. It can also be used with XML and ISO.

Strengths of RapidILL include its recent acquisition by ExLibris. ExLibris plans to expand RapidILL and provide support. Ownership by ExLibris will also expand the user base of RapidILL, increasing the ability of libraries to receive requested items: "As the RapidILL installed base grows, so do the opportunities for more efficient resource sharing" (MENA Report, 2019). The new owning company states that RapidILL is community-oriented, making it friendly for users on both ends. One example of this idea is that a library can join multiple pods for no extra fee. The Cosmo Pod allows libraries access to holdings at RapidILL libraries worldwide, including in Singapore, Taiwan, New Zealand, and Australia (ExLibris Ltd, 2019). Like the number of institutions, the amount of countries involved in ILL increase the ability to find requested articles. Another community-oriented attribute is the lack of training needed to operate

RapidILL; there is also little setup (ExLibris Ltd, 2019). Transactions through RapidILL are also free of the fees typically requested by companies such as OCLC (Rabinowitz, 2009; MacWaters, 2013). RapidILL also uses tools for automation, such as its aforementioned ability to use the library's call numbers when a library receives an ILL request (Delaney & Richins, 2012).

Delivery is also automated.

RapidILL allows libraries to process more ILL requests with efficiency, and it also has a high success and response rate. RapidILL can greatly increase a library's lending volume. Tufts University Hirsh Health Sciences Library saw a 96% increase in filled lending requests after adopting RapidILL. (Rabinowitz, 2009). This increase demonstrates RapidILL's power to aid students, faculty, and staff with receiving requested articles and book chapters. Regarding fill rates in general, "This service has a documented history of high fill rates, typically 94 percent or higher" (MacWaters, 2013). In addition to aiding users, the RapidILL fill rates also demonstrate the system's ability to provide ease of use for libraries. Because libraries can easily locate the items requested, librarians can turn items around within hours instead of days (MacWaters, 2013). The system increases efficiency, removing time the requesting library must wait.

Weaknesses of the system unfortunately also include its efficiency. Most ILL systems deliver within a day, according to Rabinowitz (2009). RapidILL, while faster, may not be significantly faster enough to warrant installation. Additionally, the time frame can be increased substantially for certain inquiries: "If no RapidILL lender was found for the article in question, the request was booted out of the system into ILLiad until the problem was resolved and a lender was identified" (Rabinowitz, 2009). Many of these lender issues occur with book chapters. As of 2013, only 23 libraries participated in the book chapter sharing branch of RapidILL (MacWaters,

2013). As a result, the fulfillment rate of the book chapter requests was only 67 percent on average, compared with the 94 percent return rate on journal articles (MacWaters, 2013). With increasing interest in lending book chapters, these numbers are concerning.

Fortunately, the benefits of RapidILL far outweigh any weaknesses. Any increased processing time can save a student (or faculty member) working to a last-minute deadline. A community-oriented approach lends itself to this faster processing, and ExLibris plans to foster the models for RapidILL that have worked so well thus far. More and more institutions join annually, and more are certain to join now that RapidILL is under the ExLibris umbrella. Since RapidILL is compatible with so many systems and formats, this library should have no trouble implementing RapidILL and integrating it into the current systems. This report suggests that RapidILL would be a valuable addition to this library.

References

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