

Access-It Case Study

North Lanarkshire LEA Evaluates New Library Systems

Russell Brown - Head Librarian, North Lanarkshire ERS, explains ...

What was the goal for the project?

The aim of the special project was to find a library management solution to replace the existing software that was currently being used in all the secondary schools within the North Lanarkshire LEA. We were keen to ensure that we purchased a new system that was fit for purpose and could meet the needs of a modern school library setting.

What sort of evaluation took place and over what period?

This comprehensive process took over 12 months to complete. North Lanarkshire Council Education Resource Service (ERS) set about to identify the major library suppliers within the market, carry out an evaluation of the short-listed library suppliers, and proceed through a detailed pilot phase with a selected solution. The review process was completed in close consultation with school librarians within the authority as well as public library staff, ICT advisory staff, and the Education Directorate. A detailed technical assessment of software solutions was completed and short-listed suppliers were asked to give a presentation to school library and other interested staff.

The pilot included the installation of Access-It Library at three sites - two secondary school library resource centres and the Education Resource Service centre. As with the review process, the pilot project was conducted under a best-value regime (Challenge, Compare, Consult Compete). This was achieved in the following ways:

Challenge: The system was challenged to operate to a high standard in a secondary library resource centre setting, to conduct a successful data transfer in all three

sites, to offer high quality technical support to members of the pilot project, and to improve the overall quality of automated service currently available to school librarians and ERS staff.

Compare: The three sites taking part in the pilot project were compared against a standard set of performance measures. Performance measures were developed and agreed by members of the pilot project.

Consult: Members of staff situated in the three pilot sites were consulted regularly during the pilot phase. Their views were not only used to inform the direction of the pilot project (by the ERS and Access-It Software Ltd), but also to compile the main elements of this report.

Compete: Although Access-It was selected as the solution of choice for the pilot phase of the review programme it was made clear to the company that successful appointment of a contract for the remaining secondary school library resource centre sites depended not only on following appropriate Council regulations but also on the system's performance during the pilot stage.

On completion of the three-month pilot phase, a comprehensive evaluation took place and a report outlining the findings of the pilot project was submitted to the relevant committee.

Why was Access-It Library chosen?

Access-It was recognised as a solution that would provide the flexibility and power to cater for the diverse needs of our libraries and resource centres. It was essential that we purchased a truly cross-platform system that was robust enough to operate in the

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varying network environments within our secondary schools.

We were also looking for a company that was big enough to support the needs of school librarians across the authority but small enough to be responsive to individual needs. We feel we have found that balance in Access-It Software.

What is the view of the support provided by the company?

We have found that the company delivers on its promises. Its staff have been supportive and responsive to our many demands. Where they can meet our requests they will endeavour to do so, where they cannot they are honest enough to tell us. The online technical support and the responsive and understanding nature of the staff are particularly valued aspects of the service.

The fact that the system itself is well-built and robust has meant that only a limited level of technical support has been required.

Is the system measuring up to expectations?

So far it is exceeding them. We now have a flexible, modern library management system that allows us to develop services into areas that were not possible before - email overdue forms, area print-outs of overdue letters, the powerful global change facility etc.

During the period of the pilot project Access-It proved to be a robust, flexible and easy to manage library automation system. The strengths that set it apart at the review stage (cross-platform, ability to catalogue electronic media including PDF, strong customer focus, extensive self-service options) were all evident once the system had been implemented. The pilot showed Access-It to have a powerful data manipulation facility empowering staff to improve data records transposed from the previous system. Staff

also felt that the functionality now available gave them many more options with regard to managing stock, controlling and reviewing data, and cutting down on labour-intensive tasks.

Is Access-It Software Ltd responsive to your needs?

They have been very responsive to implementing new ideas that have been specific to our requirements. We particularly like the fact that the company sees info from its customers as vital to on-going development of the product. From the outset, the company was keen to stress that the system is developed in close consultation and that many of the new features are developed because of customer comments. Already we have given them many ideas for new features we would like to see in the next version.

Is there an established on-going relationship?

From the outset both Access-It and the ERS have been keen to develop a close working relationship. It is this relationship that has enabled the roll-out of the system in North Lanarkshire to be such a success.

Both parties understand that this is a long-term relationship. As far as the ERS is concerned, we are not only buying a software solution, we are also buying into a software concept that will enable us to improve the quality of library provision within this authority. This can only be done in close partnership with the software supplier.

I believe we have purchased a software solution that will significantly enhance service provision within secondary school library resource centres and the ERS. There is already sufficient evidence to suggest that this is the case. Access-It is a powerful, robust and well-designed library software solution. I am convinced we have made the right choice for our schools.