Smarter Libraries through Technology

Streaming Video: The Current Phase of Digital Services for Libraries

By Marshall Breeding

Libraries in recent years have seen increasing interest in providing access to streaming video to their patrons. Use of physical media, such as DVDs and Blu-ray, has dwindled in the library in tandem to trends in the consumer market, which has seen an almost complete pivot to on-demand streaming services, such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and HBO Max. The cost of these subscription services represents a financial burden. Consistent with the mission of libraries to provide books and ebooks that can be accessed without cost to their patrons, similar concerns apply to video content. Libraries seek to provide digital content in ways that are free to their patrons, supporting this access through content or subscription fees they purchase.

This fundamental model of purchasing content for cost-free lending to patrons prevails across all formats. Ebook lending services have become mainstays for public libraries but bring considerable challenges to libraries due to high licensing costs and access limitations imposed by publishers. Libraries, publishers, and ebook lending platform providers continue to work toward more optimal pricing and access models.

The streaming video arena presents similar challenges. Libraries increasingly want to provide high-quality video offerings to their patrons. Consistent with book and ebook collections, libraries want to provide both educational and recreational materials. Library-oriented content providers have responded to this demand, offering packages for libraries to purchase or license, enabling patrons access without cost.

Streaming video has become an established part of library offerings. Some of the major library-oriented video content packages or streaming services include:

- Alexander Street, which specializes in video content for libraries, including documentaries and other primary source material. Alexander Street was acquired by ProQuest in June 2016. ProQuest's video collections that were previously offered as separate products have shifted to the Alexander Street platform, including Academic Video Online and Public Library Video Online: Premium.
- Kanopy, which is known for its curated collections of documentaries and movies selected for film studies, other academic disciplines, and general interest. Its collections include over 30,000 titles. Kanopy offers different licensing options for public and academic libraries. Kanopy became part of OverDrive in July 2021. (See the September 2021 issue of *Smart Libraries Newsletter* for details about Kanopy and OverDrive.)
- OverDrive, known especially for its ebook and audiobook lending service, also offers streaming video. Its recent acquisition of Kanopy indicates that streaming video is a growing area of interest for the company.
- Hoopla, which has become widely adopted by public libraries for its extensive audiobook collections, also includes movies and television programs through streaming.

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- Swank Motion Pictures offers streaming digital movie services for many types of organizations. Swank Digital Campus offers collections of over 25,000 movies and documentaries.[1]

Over the course of the last few decades, libraries have continually expanded their collections and services to include digital content. The initial phase of this transition took the form of the shift of scholarly journals from print to electronic formats. This transition has redefined much of the work of academic libraries.

The next phase of the expansion of library services into digital content led to the creation of ebook platforms for libraries. OverDrive launched its ebook lending for service for libraries in 2003 and continues to be the global leader in this sector. Other examples include ProQuest

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acquiring ebrary and EBL, which has since been developed into Ebook Central. EBSCO Information Services acquired library ebook pioneer NetLibrary in 2010 and has developed the extensive collections available through EBSCO eBooks. Bibliotheca acquired the cloudLibrary service from 3M in 2015 and has continued to improve its technology platform and expand its coverage. Baker & Taylor launched its Axis 360 ebook lending service in 2015.

Given rising interest in the expansion of digital content offerings, it is not surprising to see some of the major players investing in streaming video services. The acquisition of Alexander Street by ProQuest and OverDrive's acquisition of Kanopy reflect this trend. This issue of *Smart Libraries Newsletter* features the launch of biblio+, a streaming service for public libraries recently launched by Bibliotheca.

Bibliotheca Launches biblio+

Bibliotheca has launched a new streaming entertainment service for libraries under the brand biblio+. This service addresses the complications and complexities associated with many of the existing library-oriented video services. Libraries pay an "unlimited access fee" for unlimited access to a wide selection of content. This fee is not tied to the volume of use by their patrons either in terms of simultaneous use of a title or the total number of titles viewed.

The service is free to library patrons, supported by access fees paid by their library. Biblio+ does not present advertisements to patrons.

Library patrons gain access to movies offered by biblio+ through signing in with their library card number. The biblio+ app is available for IOS, Android, and Smart TVs, such as Amazon Fire TV, Google TV, and Roku. The service can be accessed from a computer through biblioplus.com.

The development of biblio+ has been led by Stephane Richard, Senior Vice President for Movie and Streaming Products of biblio+, a new business unit of Bibliotheca. Richard previously served as Chief Product Officer for Kanopy (2016–2019). Oliver Martin is the Chief Product Officer for Bibliotheca and oversees biblio+.

The biblio+ collection focuses on entertainment, including a wide selection of movies. The catalog offers over 2,000

movies and will likely increase to over 5,000 in the next year. A comparison with Netflix puts the size of the biblio+ collection into perspective. According to MarketWatch, Netflix offered 3,849 movies in January 2020, down from about 6,500 in 2014.[2]

Bibliotheca launched its biblio+ service in November 2021 and is currently fulfilling requests for pricing, trails, and early subscriptions.

The company has also developed a new integrated content distribution platform, branded as uniFi+. This new technology, developed specifically for libraries, integrates with self-check kiosks, remote lockers, public computers, digital signage, and other devices to distribute content across library locations to patron-facing screens and equipment. UniFi+ is available to libraries in all the global regions it serves.

Bibliotheca Corporate Background

Bibliotheca is a major company offering a diverse range of products, including access and security systems, remote patron community solutions, self-service hardware and software, automated material handling, RFID, barcode, and electromagnetic technologies as well as the cloudLibrary digital lending platform. The biblio+ streaming media platform

complements Bibliotheca's cloudLibrary platform for library lending of ebooks, audiobooks, comics, and magazines.

Bibliotheca was formed in 2011 through the acquisition of Bibliotheca RFID Library Systems based in Switzerland, Intellident based in the United Kingdom, and Integrated Library Group based in the United States, by One Equity Partners and merged them into a global company providing RFID technologies, self-service, and automated material handling equipment. Bibliotheca continued to expand with the acquisition of Tron Library Systems in 2012 and Alturis Group in 2015. In 2015 Bibliotheca acquired the Library Systems division of 3M, which substantially expanded its market share in the self-service and inventory security arena and provided an entry into the ebook lending sector through the cloudLibrary service. Over the course of the last decade, Bibliotheca has streamlined its

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product lines acquired from its incumbent businesses and unified its branding. Figure 1 illustrates Bibliotheca's mergers and acquisitions.

Its products take an increasingly comprehensive reach into libraries, spanning the management of physical inventory and the provision of digital content. The recently launched biblio+ streaming video platform complements cloudLibrary and strengthens its position as a provider of digital content services for public libraries.

The company saw a major change in its executive management team in January 2020, with the appointment of Ray Hood as Chief Executive Officer, Fred Gattelaro as Chief Operations Officer, Michael Burstein as Chief Financial Officer, and Oliver Martin as Chief Product Officer. Since the installation of the new executive team, the company has accelerated product
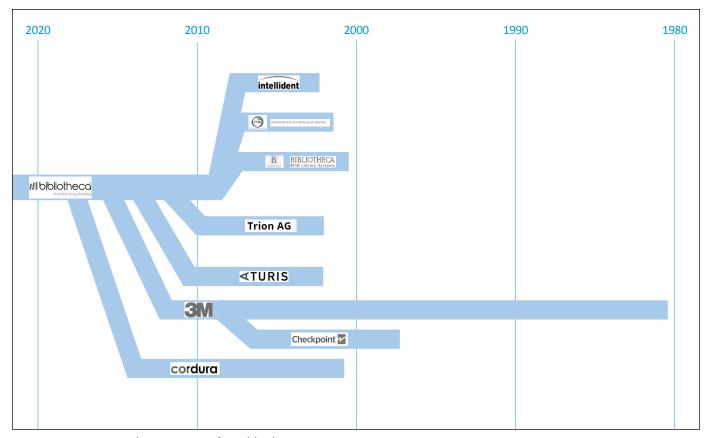

Figure 1. Mergers and Acquisitions for Bibliotheca
Source: Marshall Breeding, Library Technology Guides, https://librarytechnology.org/mergers/bibliotheca.

development and created a suite of integrated products that form a technology ecosystem which serves libraries and their patrons.

Bibliotheca currently employs a workforce of 360 people, has a presence in 22 countries, and has products in over 30,000 libraries.

New Ownership for Baker & Taylor

Baker & Taylor, a major distributor of print and ebooks to libraries has changed ownership. The company has separated from Follett Corporation and has been acquired by a group of private investors led by President and Chief Executive Officer Amandeep Kochar. The composition of the investment group has not been publicly disclosed.

Baker & Taylor was acquired by Follett Corporation in April 2016. At that time, the company was estimated to bring in about $1 billion in annual revenue. (Press releases in 2016 stated that Follett was a $2.6 billion company and by 2017, following the acquisition, the stated figure was $3.6 billion.[3])

Under Follett Corporation, Baker & Taylor made some significant changes in its business strategies, shifting its business to focus as a supplier of books to libraries. In May 2019 the company discontinued its position as a wholesale distributor of books to retail bookstores to concentrate on its role as a supplier of books to public libraries. In October 2020, Baker & Taylor announced its reentry as a distributor of books and ebooks to academic libraries.

No major changes in business strategy were announced with this ownership transition. The existing executive management team and workforce will remain in place. The company will form its own board of directors as it becomes independent.

CollectionHQ, one of the businesses owned by Baker & Taylor, will continue to as an important part of its business strategy. According to Amandeep Kochar:

> Baker & Taylor's collectionHQ, a dynamic product designed to provide libraries with analytics and action plans based on collection performance, continues to be a cornerstone of our software portfolio. To meet the needs of our library customers and the communities they serve, we've added a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Analysis module. We are deeply committed to collectionHQ, as it is one way we can help our library partners work toward inclusivity and representation, regardless of location or region. Look for the DEI module to evolve in terms of enhanced functionality. Our collectionHQ team plans to combine cutting-edge technology, including AI applications, with the module's

existing evidence-based analysis tool to deliver a more inclusive collection.

Baker & Taylor continues to compete as a provider in the library ebook lending arena with its Axis 360 ebook platform. Overdrive has become established as the dominant force in the library ebook lending arena, with the Bibliotheca cloudLibrary service as a contender with smaller market share. Kochar provided additional perspective regarding Baker & Taylor's ebook service:

> We're working to make the discovery and analytics more intuitive on our Axis 360 platform. B&T recently implemented a big picture, digital roadmap. We're focused on modernizing core digital offerings, introducing innovative features, reviewing process improvements for librarians and finally, impacting community outreach and the end patron experience.

> Primarily, our goal is to provide new tools for librarians to connect more easily with their patrons, thus improving community engagement. Building on the success of our Virtual Book Club program, we are launching additional reading programs. Within Axis 360, we've seen a positive response to e-newspaper and e-magazine offerings and plan to expand the platform to include additional formats.

Follett Corporation Divestments

The sale of Baker & Taylor follows the recent divestment of its K–12 school technology business. In September 2021, Follett Corporation divested Follett School Solutions, selling the business to Francisco Partners. This change was featured in the October 2021 issue of *Smart Libraries Newsletter*.

Prior to these events, Follett Corporation was organized into three business divisions—Follett School Solutions, Follett Education, and Baker & Taylor. According to Follett representatives, revenue for these three businesses totaled about $3 billion in mid-2021.

Following the divestitures of Follett School Solutions and Baker & Taylor, Follett Education remains the corporation's primary business. This division operates college bookstores and virtual storefronts for higher educational institutions with Barnes & Noble as its major competitor.

Follett Corporation did not disclose any intentions regarding its Follett Education business.

The history and background of Follett Corporation was featured in the June 2016 issue of *Smart Libraries Newsletter*.

Libraries Ireland Moves to Spydus

One of the major trends in the library technology arena has been large-scale implementations, where a large number of libraries share a system. These arrangements enable patrons to access much larger collections than might be available at their local branch and represents savings for libraries compared to the cost of separate stand-alone systems. The public libraries of Ireland embarked on an ambitious project in 2014 to implement a single shared platform, moving from several previous incumbent systems. At that time, the Libraries Ireland project selected and implemented Sierra from Innovative Interfaces to support the 330 library branches in the country. Following a recent tender process conducted by the Irish Local Government Management Agency, Civica announced the selection of its Spydus library management system for the consortium. Spydus has only a few installations in North America, but it is a major competitor in the United Kingdom, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and Asia.

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The public libraries and school libraries in Denmark have shared a system since 2014. A new library management system, branded as Cicero, was developed for this project by Systematic, a major IT services company. This implementation serves over 2,428 public and school libraries across Denmark's 99 municipalities and is the largest shared automation system. This project was covered in the June 2018 issue of *Smart Libraries Newsletter*.

Smart Libraries Newsletter Sunsets

This issue is the last for *Smart Libraries Newsletter*. Its format as a subscription-based newsletter no longer generates the income needed for ALA TechSource to continue to produce and publish it every month. The expectation for free content on the web has made maintaining paid subscribers challenging. This decision is not unexpected or unwelcome. As a newsletter covering current events in the library technology industry, an open access business model with immediate availability will be a better approach.

My arrangement with ALA TechSource has allowed me to make the content of *Smart Libraries Newsletter* available on my Library Technology Guides website six months after original publication (see https://librarytechnology.org /smartlibraries/). There has been a close relationship between *Smart Libraries Newsletter* and Library Technology Guides since I have been its primary editor. Press announcements aggregated on Library Technology Guides have often sparked further investigation and research leading to articles published in *Smart Libraries Newsletter*. Many of these articles include or link to graphs, visualizations, and documents on Library Technology Guides.

I plan to launch a monthly online publication with similar scope beginning in January 2022. Details have not yet been finalized and will be announced on Library Technology Guides.

This newsletter continues an important legacy. ALA TechSource began *Smart Libraries Newsletter* in January 2001 as the successor to Library Systems Newsletter. With Howard S.

White as Editor-in-Chief and Richard W. Boss as contributing editor, this publication covered the main events and details of the library automation industry for almost two decades from July 1981 through December 2000. This historic content is also available on Library Technology Guides through a license provided by ALA Publishing. It has often proven to be a valuable source of information regarding some of the companies and products active during this phase of the industry.

Library Systems Newsletter morphed into *Smart Libraries Newsletter* in January 2001, with Richard Boss continuing as contributing editor and Miriam Wuensch as Publisher. In September 2002 Boss exited his long-standing role as contributing editor, writing:

> Serving as Library Systems Newsletter's contributing editor since its launch in 1981 has been my pleasure. I have written more than 2,000 articles over the years. . . . Thank you for reading.

A new group of industry experts took the reins of the newsletter in October 2002, including Patricia Caplan, Judy Luther, and Andrew Pace. I was invited to join the rotation in September 2003, contributing stories to every other issue on developments on technology companies or products. Tom Peters joined as a contributing editor in January 2004. Between November 2004 and January 2010, Tom Peters and I served as joint contributing editors, covering respectively digital content issues and library technologies. Since February 2010, I have been the exclusive contributing editor, bringing the focus of the newsletter more sharply on the library technology industry.

Thanks to Dan Freeman, Samantha Kundert, and Patrick Hogan, who have served as Managing Editor of the newsletter at different times.

I look forward to connecting with the readers of *Smart Libraries Newsletter* on Library Technology Guides, where I will continue to write about the major developments and events in the library technology industry.

Notes

1. See Swank, "Digital Campus," www.swank.com/digital-campus/.
2. Meera Jagannathan, "It's Not Your Imagination—Netflix Doesn't Have as Many Movies as It Used To," MarketWatch, January 25, 2020, https://www.marketwatch.com/story/its-not-your-imagination-netflix-doesnt-have-as-many-movies-as-it-used-to-2019-12-04.
3. Follett, "Follett Acquires Baker & Taylor," news release, April 18, 2016, https://www.follett.com/bakerandtaylor/.

A Note to Our Readers
from ALA TechSource

Smart Libraries Newsletter will cease publication with this December issue. Formerly Library Systems Newsletter, *Smart Libraries Newsletter* has been in print for forty-one years. We want to thank you for reading and engaging with us over the last four decades and for coming back monthly for the latest updates in the library technology industry.

We also want to thank Marshall Breeding for his in-depth knowledge of the industry, his contributions, and his dedication to this publication. He has been involved with *Smart Libraries Newsletter* since 2003—first as a contributing editor and eventually as the sole author and editor. For the latest updates and news in the library technology field, you can follow Marshall on his website Library Technology Guides (librarytechnology .org).

As we (the staff members in ALA TechSource and ALA Editions) look forward beyond this final monthly edition of *Smart Libraries Newsletter*, our intention is to continue providing content that inspires library workers to make informed decisions about technology products and projects. For the latest resources regarding library technology, see our current offerings of *Library Technology Reports*, available at https://www.alastore.ala .org/search/store/publisher/1504.

If you have questions about your subscription, please contact us at subscriptions@ala.org or call toll free at (800) 545-2433, ext. 4299.

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