Evergreen Conference

Train Up Catalogers in the Way They Should Go

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>> GINA MONTI: I'm seeing 12 o'clock, this is track two and we will be having Jonathan so thank you for coming to talk about cataloging so Train up Catalogers in the Way They Should Go, this is a presentation that I want to thank our sponsors so Mobius is going to be sponsoring the captions for this track I put a link in the track and I will periodically put them in there appeared of course for the Evergreen community development initiative for platform sponsor and this is recorded session. if you have any questions for Jonathan feel free to pose them in the chat and whenever you are ready, Jonathan taken away.

>> JONATHAN MOORE: Hello and thank you for coming. It is really an honor for me to be here. My name is Jonathan Moore cataloger at Wyomissing Public Library, a small public library in southeastern Pennsylvania outside of the city of Reading. We are at the point of what I would be talking about today and I serve as chair of the cataloging committee for Spark, consulting statewide Evergreen consortium. Spark has recently completed a very extensive project where we have completely rethought our approach to cataloging. How we structure our permissions, how we provide training and how we certify our catalogers.

During the next 45 minutes or so I would like to tell you about our journey.

Here is a very rough outline of what I will be covering today. I will start by sharing a little bit about our consortium. Our history, our unique characteristics, and how these impacted our cataloging environment. Next I will focus on the cataloging issues that we face, the things that made us feel that change was necessary, then I will give our strategy for addressing the problems. After that will go into the gritty details of putting our strategy into practice and finally I will close with a few words on the results and on the lessons that we learned along the way.

In order to understand why we chose to do what we did, there are a number of unique characteristics about our consortium that I probably should explain to you. Spark has been in existence for roughly a decade and be started as a group with about two dozen libraries and library systems scattered across Pennsylvania. We all began using Evergreen in late 2011 and 2012.

In terms of our consortium and what it is like today the first thing to point out is that there has been a lot of growth, from the original two dozen members, SPARK has more than 150 different libraries and systems, that means we have a lot more people cataloging and we have all of much larger, much more complex shared catalog.

Beyond that it is important to note that SPARK is not just a regional consortium. Our members are spread out located across all parts of Pennsylvania. However, SPARK is statewide in a geographic sense but not in an all-inclusive sense. There are plenty of libraries and systems that do not belong to us. And while some of our members are close together on the map, many of them are not. When in the list of institutions we are very diverse both in terms of the size of the population that we serve in the number of librarians at each location.

When you put all these factors together, they add up to a major difficulty for SPARK. Giving a sense of consortium wide community. Making changes across all of SPARK, getting all the members acting in the same way has always been inherently difficult.

And when it comes to cataloging in SPARK, specifically there are a few more things to share. First, while we do share a catalog, we do not have SPARK-wide centralized cataloging. Every member is responsible for cataloging their own materials. We have a lot of cooks in our kitchen as it were.

Second, SPARK does not have consortium-wide resource sharing. With very few exceptions, item records from each member to not really leave the domain of that member, it makes it very easy for people to forget that their actions impact people at other places. And the cataloging staff at each location are wildly different. Some of our libraries have half a dozen or more people cataloging. Others like Wyomissing just have one. Some of our people are full-time catalogers, people who like to for whatever reason have a passion for it and others are just kind of in the role by default because they are the only employee at the library and there's literally nobody else to do it.

When you combine all of these with how decentralized SPARK is, as a whole, it breeds an environment where cataloging trouble is very likely to happen.

To be honest, we have faced our fair share of trouble. The quality of the MARC records in our catalog, we just felt like it was not at a level that anyone was comfortable with. It wasn't acceptable just in terms of the records that were imported and the records created originally. The standard was just not high enough.

And there were so many many changes that happen to our catalog that just should not have taken place. MARC records could be edited randomly and records would be combined and merged for no apparent reason. Finally, the duplicates. Good God, the duplicates. I don't have the words to describe how often this happened or how frustrating it was to all of us.

I know that all of these things will pop up to some degree in any shared catalog. And some of these things may happen to some degree when you do a system-wide change, or when a new library migrates to your consortium. But the extent and the frequency of everything going on made it clear that her things were happening.

Anyway, those are all of the bad things that people noticed but in and of themselves, they weren't really the problem. They were just symptoms, side effects of one underlying cause.

Us. There's no way to, there's no polite way to say this our catalogers were just not using the Evergreen properly. To be clear, I want to be very clear about this I am not saying it was all of them or even a majority of them, and I'm not saying this out of blame or anger or any kind of malice. People were making honest mistakes.

But the mistakes were still causing damage. And we needed to face the facts, until he addressed the foundational cause of trouble, no other changes, no other improvements at a chance of lasting so with the adoption of that premise we had to do a little bit of introspection -- we took afresh look at our cataloging environment we found three contributing factors, the structure of our cataloging permissions. The lack of uniform cataloging training and the complete absence of any kind of system of accountability.

Allow me to go into more detail about these. First with the structure of our cataloging permissions, with the way that things work, we had Two tier system. if you want to make a new staff account for someone that was new to the SPARK. They could be at the lower level where they manage local holdings in import single records using Z39.50, or you could have them create original MARC records, delete, merge or manage MARC. Do batch changes to records import batches of MARC records manage electronic records -- it was a system that was rife with an equal balance.

Rather than the kind of 50-50 split that you would expect with the system like this, it was more like 15-85. It was almost all or nothing. Could either have your catalog or do the bare minimum or you could give them access to literally everything, whether they needed all the extra stuff or not. We desperately needed more options when deciding what we wanted to allow our catalogers to do.

And then there was the issue of catalog retraining with the way that we have things set up, when a new catalog or was hired at an existing SPARK library, training for them was arranged just by that member library. Not all of our libraries really had the resources to do that job properly. And to be honest I don't know that it was reasonable for us to expect them to do that. When a new system related to SPARK for all of the new catalogers that came on their all at once basic cataloging training was provided as an element of the migration process and I'm not trying to discredit them but the cataloging there was just one part of the entirely new Evergreen environment that people were being told about. Did not or could not have the level of depth that we needed and it couldn't be as specifically crafted to SPARK as we wanted. And in terms of supporting documentation the guides, the how-to's, the beginner level step-by-step walk-throughs with pictures and screenshots made it clear what needs to be done a matter what your experience level. It was just not there.

We owed it to the catalogers, to all the catalogers that we needed to show them what to do and how to properly do it.

Lastly, the matter of accountability. In any shared bibliographic catalog, there's always the potential for a lot of unintentional damage to be done. And with the way that we had things set up, there were no, there were no requirements that people how to meet before they were given access to cataloging permissions. There was no certification, there is no way for people to demonstrate that they had at least reasonable knowledge. And from a technical standpoint, there were no restrictions on who could do the assigning.

The local SPARK library could create the highest level catalog or accounts. Look, there's a reason that we have laws saying that before people can legally drive a car they need to pass a road test and go through drivers at its center. If your kid turns 16 and they say okay, that I want to drive, and you just give them your keys, you really shouldn't be surprised if things start to get wrecked.

But without a basic system of accountability, there was nothing that we could really do about it.

Anyhow, those were the problems.

Here is what we decided to do. I will give a very quick overview of our strategy first. And then go into more details when I talk about the process of implementation.

In terms of having unequal cataloging tears, because we were unhappy with the current structure we decided to build an entirely new one. We started from the ground up and made a structure that had more levels and we completely re-mapped what permission was assigned to each tier.

To address our training means, we created an entirely new set of standardized cataloging training courses. Explaining out literally to do everything that a cataloger might need to do. We customized those courses to fit our new permission structure and to fit our unique needs and most importantly, we made sure that all of our catalogers had access to the courses no matter who they were or where they came from.

And because we needed some way for catalogers to show accountability, we created a very rudimentary certification system, all way for catalogers to demonstrate that they had a reasonable knowledge of how to responsibly use their permissions.

From a practical standpoint I think the best way to think about this is as a knowledge check, something to complete after training was done just to show the course content was understood. And we restricted the ability to assign the higher permission groups to SPARK staff.

Now that you know the just of our plan of attack, let me share some about what it was like to put that plan into action. When it comes to creating a new permission structure, the first thing that you need to decide is how many tears should the new system have? How many levels? How large? How extended should it be?

One of the things that we quickly discovered is that there is a very, very fine line between not having enough options and having far too many. When your staff look at a permission system for cataloging it should not be a complicated task to figure out where they belong.

using a hierarchy can make things easier. Let's say that before someone can take training for level II of a structure they need to start after taking training for level I. Before someone can train for level III they start with level one and go to level II and take level III and so on.

Because everything builds on itself, it saves a lot of time and ultimately with SPARK We Try to Be a Three-Tier Structure Adding One More Level -- and I Know It Doesn't Seem like That Big of a Change but making that small shift gave us a lot more flexibility.

Once you know how many tiers you want to be working with, the next question becomes how should you decide what permission goes to what level. One approach that you could take is to match permission allocations to what the standard cataloging workflow looks like at your consortium. For SPARK, however, this did not really work. And so as I alluded to, SPARK catalogers did not have standard workflow. We were diverse and almost everybody did things differently.

In terms of deciding what permissions should go where, the best that I can suggest is this. Find a strategy that matches your basic project goals and stick with it. No matter what you decide, no matter how things are allocated, it is impossible to make everybody happy. All that you can do is trust that your plan is for the best and wait for people to come around. In terms of what we decided to do, I don't mean this to sound cynical but because we were basically trying to combat human error, the basic mindset that we started with was if a person unknowingly uses cataloging permission in the wrong way, much accidental damage could they cause?

And when we started drinking the permissions from least dangerous to most dangerous we notice that the correlated, the correlated very closely with the amount of change that a person could affect the entire SPARK-wide catalog.

That is basically what we went with. With the three-tiered system we came up with at the entry level, catalogers only have the ability to change local holdings. Basically to create, edit and transfer and delete item records. At the next level up we introduce the ability to bring in new MARC records to the catalog using various means. Mark batch import etc. Mark batch import etc.

Finally at the highest level, catalogers have maximum abilities. They can import new bib records and make changes to stuff already in SPARK. They can create original records from scratch.

That is the rough outline anyway. The breakdown does not fit 100% but it is close enough to work well enough for what we need.

I do have one final word to add about the permission allocation process and that word is testing.

We went into this process with a very good understanding of what the Evergreen cataloging functions are. But it is amazing how difficult it can be for a novice to match up permission tasks with the actual given permission names.

The support and the patients that we got from Equinox was incredible, it was phenomenal, we never could have gotten through this without them, but even with all the assistance that they gave, there were several times when I thought we finally had things perfect and we found out that we did not. So we would strongly recommend you involved as many people as possible from as many places as possible in the hunt for bugs and make sure you factor in enough time for missteps.

Training. There is no doubt in my mind that education is the cornerstone, it is the foundation of any big project like ours. But from a practical standpoint, the way that training plays out is going to be heavily dependent on the cataloging environment of your consortium. Some of you listening and watching might have the resources to do live in person testing and if you can do that, that is wonderful, that is great.

But for SPARK, that is just not a practical option. SPARK has very few full-time employees. As far as myself and every other person on the cataloging committee, we already have full-time jobs. We already have 40 hour a week commitments to our member local libraries. All of the committee work, all of these SPARK related stuff that we do is just adding on top of that.

I guess what I am getting at is that we did, we have lofty goals but we knew that we needed to be matter-of-fact about how we get to those goals.

The first thing to consider in terms of training courses is how do you get the courses to your catalogers?

Well, at SPARK, we knew from the beginning that in person training was not really an option. We just didn't have the staffing to make that happen. So online instruction was the best way for us to go.

Another thing that we have to think about, are you going to go with live training or prerecorded? For us, the most practical option again was prerecorded. He eventually wound up with a total of three videophiles. One for each level of the new permission system. And I think this approach has turned out very well for us. We live in an on-demand world where people expect access to things at any time from any location. And with the approach that we wound up going with was VEED. the delivery vehicle we went with is a software called Goto Webinar which makes it very easy to keep track of course registration and to keep track, keep track of who is assigned and how to contact them.

When it comes to the organization of your courses the first thing I would say is this. You do not need to re-create the wheel. The content of our classes was heavily based on examples provided by Evergreen data. We reached out to them very early in our process and one of their trainers was kind enough to share their PowerPoint templates and what they used in their training courses. She even let me sit on one of their online training sessions. And incidentally if anybody listening, if you want to steal from us, you are more than welcome to do so. When you go to the final screen of this presentation we have links that will tell you where to go and dedicate everything we did.

Another thought, be very methodical in how you present your content, each of the training videos we made, each of them are broken down to a dozen or more segments and each segment is about one function. This was absolutely key in making things accessible to everybody. Finally, before you introduce new topic make sure that you have already provided everything people need to understand. Introduce new terminology at the beginning and make sure you explain the theory and thinking before you show any walk-throughs. However you present make sure you have a knowledge foundation already in place to support it.

Once all of the organization and prep work is done, it came time to record the video footage. There is no way to sugarcoat things. This took a while. But I do have you pointers to share. When it comes to the recording process, I would recommend that you do not capture footage directly from Evergreen. Rather just take screenshots of key moments and import them to PowerPoint and replicate the life experience.

Taking this approach involves a little more prep work at the beginning but the advantages make up for it. Allow me to give you a brief example of what I mean.

What we are looking at now it is from whatever courses for z39.50 you have basic additions that highlight exactly what part of the screen you want your audience to look at, rather than just kind of waiting a mouse around, you can make it really obvious for people pate, everybody, look here, and then look in those two places down there and then finally look here.

A few other benefits of this approach but job of editing footage becomes much easier if you need to stop the recording for whatever reason you want to pick things up at the same place you can guarantee that every pixel will be in the same place it was when you stopped. By doing things this way it gets ridiculously easy to reuse the assets for other purposes. All you have to do is select the image from PowerPoint and copy it and paste it and your basically good to go.

Finally in regards to the training courses, as before, review is critical. Allow as much time as possible, round up as many sample video watchers as you can get your hands on. He found it helpful to have one shared Google document just for basic comments by everybody. Have that coordination keep everything together. And make sure that people had timestamps for each video session they are talking about.

Lastly, the certification system, before you can start work on this, there's a number of conceptual decisions you will need to make. First, who will you require to certify? Ultimately it is up to you. But I would recommend he be only as strict as new need to be. We at SPARK, ultimately have the decision not to require official certification for the entry-level class. Basically it was a matter of picking our battles, benefit changer permissions were at that level so the amount of damage that an uncertified person can do was pretty minimal. There's also the question about your current catalogers. People already cataloging with your system on the date that your new plan goes live.

In our case with SPARK, we decided it would be best to ask them to certify and this was strictly a matter of professional courtesy. Just basically politeness. If we asked new catalogers to jump through certain hoops before we let them do their jobs, it is only fair to ask you to show them that we are willing to jump through the same hoops and show them that we are willing to do anything that we ask them to do.

's All of that is decided, the next thing to think about is how will you administer the process. Given our resources we knew that certification would need to be done online. And like the video courses, certification would need to be automated. On-demand. But getting both of these things accomplished was very much easier said than done. With an automated system like we would need to use, there is no way to have the test taker use Evergreen while doing it. We had to turn to online quiz software. For the person taking the test, I would imagine the process is like filling out a detailed Internet questionnaire.

you can get creative with Google forms or something similar like that.

When it comes to the content of the certification quiz, here are a few thoughts on questions. I would recommend that you organize things using exactly the same structure as the training courses. Faculty subjects in the exact same order. If a test-taker is not sure about the answer and they want to double back and check the course, there shouldn't be doubt as far as where they should be looking. Finding a sample of MARC records to use for your records will take you a long time and that just cannot be helped.

Every question created needs to have a correct answer and only one correct answer. And all of the incorrect answers need to be plausible but ideally they need to be incorrect in a different way. I know it is complicated and a lot of effort but for the quizzes to work you kind of need to do it. In terms of how to ask things, as detailed as the questions may need to be, try keep things as basic and simple as can be. Do not make things super difficult just for the sake of being clever. It accomplishes nothing. During review or during the first stages of implementation, if certain questions are answered incorrectly by most people, and if the thing in question is not absolutely life or death, change things up. Switch things.

The very last thing that you will need to decide upon with certification is what to do about evaluating test results. And I'm not really sure there is one right way to approach this quandary.

You can choose to take a strict pass or fail approach but for us ultimately I don't think that was the best way to go. There are two main reasons I say that. You have to remember that the software being used to take the test, it is not Evergreen, it is different than the environment and the way things are set up. When we are asked what they are being asked to do. So leeway is really just needed. One practical element, at this point in the project we only have one set of questions for each exam. If people fail the test and may need to get another shot at taking it and if it is exact same set of questions it defeats the purpose.

What we eventually settled on was a combination of the two things. Basically each of our exams is divided up into multiple screens. Just one topic. People answer all the questions on the screen and click "next", if everything's been answered correctly they go on to the next portion. And if anything has been answered incorrectly, they are not allowed to move on until they go back to their answers and find their mistakes and correct them. Admittedly it is a bit of a compromise but at least it lets us know that by the time someone's gone to the test if given correct answers to 100% of the questions even if it took a few tries to get some of the questions right.

Reflections. So, in a nutshell, that is our story. From start to finish, from initial proposal to go live day, the whole project took more than a year of hard work. But the system has been in place now for few months. As we analyze things, what are the lessons that I can share with you? I think they boil down to three things. Do not be afraid to suggest change. People are much more open than you might expect. There were a number of times when I had to break the news about what we wanted to do to the new groups of people and each of those times I went in thinking that I had a really hard fight in front of me but I have to say I was very surprised and happy and how people were eager on the whole to the change. As long as your plans are thought out and detailed and practical, as long as you were very intentional to emphasize how you want to do this to improve things, and as long as you are not just doing change for the sake of change, I think you'll be pleasantly surprised by how receptive people are.

Secondly, when I was trying to think about a title for this presentation my mind immediately went to a quote talking about parenting. Mainly train up children in the way they should go, and when they are old they will not depart from it.

Any parent who reads that quote will tell you that it is really more of general principle that an absolute guarantee. And we have to keep that same concept in mind in regards to the project. Unfortunately, you cannot guarantee complete success greatest some mistakes are always going to happen and you have to be honest enough to face the fact that if somebody wanted to and if they tried hard enough I think they probably could find a way to game our system, to game our system.

That is not pessimism, that is just kind of real-life. You have to keep that attitude in mind whenever you do anything big like this, or you are never going to be satisfied with the results. I know I've been talking to now for about 44 minutes and 25 seconds about how much work we've done and how long things talk and how detailed the whole thing was. But if I want to leave you with one final thought let it be this.

All of our effort has been paid back in spades. From the catalogers that I have spoken with, individually, from the people who manage catalogers that I have heard from and from the improvements that we --that everybody are already starting to see with how Evergreen looks to everybody, folks we are finally creating a solid foundation to base SPARK's catalog on.

I cannot tell you what things will look like for us by the end of the year. And I have no idea how things will look in two years, five years, but I cannot wait to find out.

In conclusion, don't ever hesitate to re-think. Do not ever be afraid to re-examine the basic approach to cataloging or to any aspect of librarianship. I can testify that it pays off. Well, that is essentially all that I have to present for you. If any of you have questions, or you want to reach out to me later in the comments, you can see my contact information is here. And if you are curious to see the training course we have done or look at the PowerPoint presentations, all of the links that you need should be right there in the file.

Again, thank you all for coming.

>> GINA MONTI: Thank you so much, Jonathan, a lot of great responses from everybody, overwhelmingly positive response for your presentation. We do have questions in here but because we have just a few minutes before we go to the next session -- I will ask a couple of them and if anyone is not had their questions answered, possibly check in on the open discussions, I think there will is one for catalogs specifically so you can pop in there and ask as well if Jonathan is around.

>> JONATHAN MOORE: Absolutely.

>> GINA MONTI: So one question was, can mid-level group edit records that they import, if the z39.50 or vendors do not corresponding to cataloging best practices?

>> JONATHAN MOORE: They do have the chance to do that during the import process yes. They have the option to look at in z39.50 or whatever. If the record of the find is not match what they want they have a chance before officially bringing it into SPARK, they have the chance to edit it and to make the corrections that they feel are needed.

>> GINA MONTI: The next question is from John and says do you know if your network similar structure for training or certification for other library staff, such as staff that process circulation and holds?

>> JONATHAN MOORE: To tell the truth, do not have anything like that. At the moment. No. People talk about some plans for the future --but for the moment not yet unfortunately.

>> GINA MONTI: How exactly do we get access to the cataloging training? But it is on the slide.

>> JONATHAN MOORE: And one thing to comment on, if you click the link for the training courses it will ask you to put in your SPARK location. You do not have to worry if you are not actually from Pennsylvania, you can put whatever you like there is just one some kind of text. Just enter whatever and click, submit and you should be good to go.

>> GINA MONTI: Okay. Do you envision refresher courses for certified staff?

>> JONATHAN MOORE: That is something we have thought about. -- We don't have any current plans for that. In SPARK we have cataloging town halls free -- two or three times a year where we let current staff get together and ask questions and for demonstrations. That is more of the vehicle we use to let people ask questions and ask for refreshers. For individual topics.

>> GINA MONTI: This last one for the interest of time, do you have any documents from which missions for which tasks, parts of the tree you ended up with?

>> JONATHAN MOORE: Actually we do. I will make sure that I import that link for that into the final version of the PowerPoint slide that goes out. But if you look at the training courses, each one of them after the introduction gives an outline of specifically what each level in our system is able to do. I will make sure that information gets out there.

>> GINA MONTI: Thank you again, Jonathan, are there any comments you wanted to mention?

>> JONATHAN MOORE: I believe that is it thank you.

>> GINA MONTI: Great session. Great stuff. And again this is recorded so that we will be able to re-watch this or if you're popping in from the next one and haven't gotten a chance to take a look at this, no worries you can watch it most conference but sorry we couldn't get through all the questions and it was an engaging conversation but again, I am certain that you could message Jonathan or also if you want to pop into an open discussion room, we have several available. Also take a look at the Expo and sea exhibitors have up for the next track. And we have -- I will share my screen for the next -- session.

Grow Your Own Evergreen with Michelle Morgan and that will start at 1 PM.

>> JONATHAN MOORE: Thank you everyone.

>> GINA MONTI: We are in Track two will pull of the schedule. If you're looking for Curbside and Other Delivery Outreach is track one. Take a look at the Expo center where the exhibitors are. And then it to 30 p.m. we have a 30 minute break after the next session going into lightning talks at 2:30 PM and track one. Following that we get sessions at three, four and 5 PM.