Automating knowledge base maintenance with KBART integration

E-resources librarians engage in a constant struggle to provide accurate access to their institution’s available electronic resources. As they manage e-resource holdings in library systems and vendor knowledge bases, they are challenged by the need to select newly-purchased resources, remove resources no longer subscribed to, and account for serial title changes. Whenever their institution’s holdings do not match the knowledge base default (e.g. years accessible, titles included in a publisher package), they must make customizations. This is a time-consuming process rife with the possibility for error.

Fortunately, at least one library system vendor, Ex Libris, has come up with a solution: the automatic updating of library electronic holdings through integration profiles with selected publishers using KBART. KBART (Knowledge Base and Related Tools) is a recommended practice from NISO that facilitates the communication between publishers and knowledge base providers of publisher offerings as well as individual library holdings.

Currently, libraries using Ex Libris’s Alma can configure connections with Elsevier and Ovid. Weekly, monthly, or on request, Alma reaches out to the publisher to retrieve a KBART-compliant file containing the institution’s entitlements and updates the knowledge base accordingly. As a result, for these publishers, any changes in the institution’s holdings are recorded automatically. This process works for e-books as well as e-journals.

The expansion of KBART integration to other publishers and library system vendors promises to liberate e-resource librarians from the tedious task of knowledge base maintenance. Of equal importance, a more accurate knowledge base contributes to lower levels of frustration among library users.

As full of potential as the KBART integration is, however, there are some drawbacks. Though the KBART recommended practice allows for the communication of gaps in an
institution’s holdings for a given serial title, right now, Alma cannot handle this; only
the first date range for a given serial is recorded and subsequent date ranges are
omitted. If a library has the integration enabled for both journals and books, multiple
MARC records will be activated for resources such as book series that have both serial
and monographic bibliographic records. And, of course, MARC records for e-books
provided by knowledge bases are often of lower quality than we would prefer.

Finally, at a broader level, there is the issue of trusting the accuracy of publisher
systems. E-resources librarians know that it is not uncommon that a publisher
disables institutional access to a paid-for resource and the error is discovered because
the discovery system link no longer leads to accessible content. If the KBART
integration had removed the discovery system link, such errors might go undetected.