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## The Swiss Library Service Platform

Unprecedented collaboration - made possible by Ex Libris Alma

475 libraries across Switzerland joined together to provide more efficient, consistent and coherent services in a single powerful platform.

### About Swiss Library Service Platform

Swiss Library Service Platform (SLSP) is a not-for-profit service provider for centrally managing resources, collaboration, interlibrary loan, e-licencing and negotiation with vendors among 475 libraries throughout Switzerland. SLSP is based in Zurich; its shareholders are 15 universities and libraries in Switzerland. The platform provides access to over 40 million books, periodicals, journals and non-book materials, as well as over three million digital articles. Information from the various libraries is easily accessible and simple to find for patrons from any region of the country. The SLSP Networks Services Department, with 24 full-time employees, is responsible for managing the overall system and the services it provides. SLSP counts currently 37 full-time employees in total.

## Creating a National Network from Scratch

Switzerland has a complex ecosystem of various kinds of libraries, of different sizes, operating in four different languages. They were organized in six academic library networks, one in the French-speaking region of the country, one in the Italian-speaking region, and four in the German-speaking region (one of which was also active in the rest of the country). In addition, there was no common library management system across the library networks. Most of the libraries were using Aleph, although in different ways and with significant influence from neighboring countries; while most of the libraries in the French-and Italian language regional network were using yet another system.

In order to bring some coherence to those disparate academic library systems, the Swiss Library Service Platform project was initiated in 2015 by 15 libraries. Intended as a service “by libraries, for libraries,” the aim was to create a national platform that brought together all the scientific information in Switzerland. The project received substantial co-financing from Swiss universities and developed into a larger network replacing previous library networks and search platforms for 475 libraries. SLSP became an incorporated not-for-profit organization, outside the organizational structure of any library or university. With the regulatory framework and governance structure of a limited company, SLSP provides the libraries it serves with transparency and financial accountability. Its shareholders consist of 15 higher education institutions and libraries that were the SLSP’s founding members.

Jürgen Küssow, Vice Director of SLSP and Head of the Networks Services Department, said that the introduction of SLSP “was really a paradigm change for Switzerland, as a federal state, where the libraries were divided by language and region, and were also very much used to making decisions on a local level. So, we knew we were stepping onto new ground.”

A tender process in 2017 revealed that the Ex Libris Alma and Primo solutions were able to meet SLSP’s unique and complex requirements. Alma’s flexible architecture allowed for grouping the 475 libraries into 29 Alma Institution Zones, together with one all-embracing Network Zone covering the combined data of all 475 libraries. Several Swiss libraries were selected as vanguard institutions, where SLSP and Ex Libris worked together to determine the most effective configuration of the Ex Libris Alma and Primo solutions. The process was carried out according to a careful, deliberate timeline, because, as Jürgen said, “we were not only implementing a library system, we were creating a network from scratch.”

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Collaboration with Ex Libris has been a journey of true partnership, which we hope will continue into the future.

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Thomas Marty , SLSP Managing Director



## Alma and the Unprecedented Swiss Collaboration

The bibliographic data from resources of the 475 Swiss libraries were migrated into Alma and made available to patrons through Primo. Several key factors, both technological and operational, made the transition and the resulting unique national collaboration a success.



**Multitenancy:** With numerous, heterogenous academic libraries in Switzerland, SLSP leveraged Alma's multitenancy architecture to simultaneously provide both a shared national platform and tailored self-management capabilities for institutions that wanted more flexibility and ownership (such as the larger university libraries). This flexibility, with centralized and decentralized configurations, allows for effective processing of bibliographic data and individualized discovery for patrons accessing the system.



**Consistent cataloging:** Effective use of Alma as a centralized library services platform required that SLSP overcome a complex cataloging challenge. While libraries in German-speaking Switzerland were cataloging according to RDA protocols, most of the French-speaking and Italian-speaking libraries were using two other cataloging systems. In an absolutely unprecedented decision, the French- and Italian-speaking libraries elected to switch to the RDA and use German cataloging rules, classifications and authority data. For the sake of the SLSP project, Jürgen said, "we now have the German rules applied also in French and Italian - and it works fine."



**Agreed terms:** Another critical agreement among the libraries was the standardization of library loan terms across all 475 libraries. Michèle Dünki, Head of Group Projects and Development in SLSP's Networks Services Department, noted that the decision to apply reciprocal terms was made even before the adoption of Alma and Primo and should be implemented in Alma. Still, during the implementation of Alma many details had to be re-defined. They also agreed to standardize fines and fees across the SLSP libraries,

which was a novel concept in light of the large variety of institutions involved. Notably, SLSP also offers an optional bursar service to centralize the collection of fines and fees incurred by patrons at different libraries, cutting down on routine administration tasks. When Alma was implemented, the agreed-upon terms were easily integrated into the system configuration.



**Nationwide courier:** SLSP introduced a courier service to manually deliver items from one library to a requesting patron at another library in the network. This is an optional service, utilized currently by 165 libraries.



**Universal patrons:** Members of the public who are registered in any of the 475 libraries, can walk into any library that's part of the network to borrow books or use their services. "That is quite a change," according to SLSP Managing Director Thomas Marty. This essentially means maintaining "a central database of users with the help of Switch, a partner also owned by the Swiss higher education institutions."



**Alma Analytics:** Built upon the comprehensive visibility and control the system provides, SLSP is able to leverage a wealth of data and insights for more informative and useful reporting. Jeannette Isele, Head of Group System and Configuration for SLSP's Networks Services Department, said the analytics is "quite important to understanding the data better, such as how often a certain service or functionality is used. Analytics is used a lot in our daily work, as well as, of course, for annual statistics reporting."

## From Implementation to the Alma Community

The implementation of Alma and Primo across 475 libraries was a huge and complex challenge that required testing a variety of configurations.

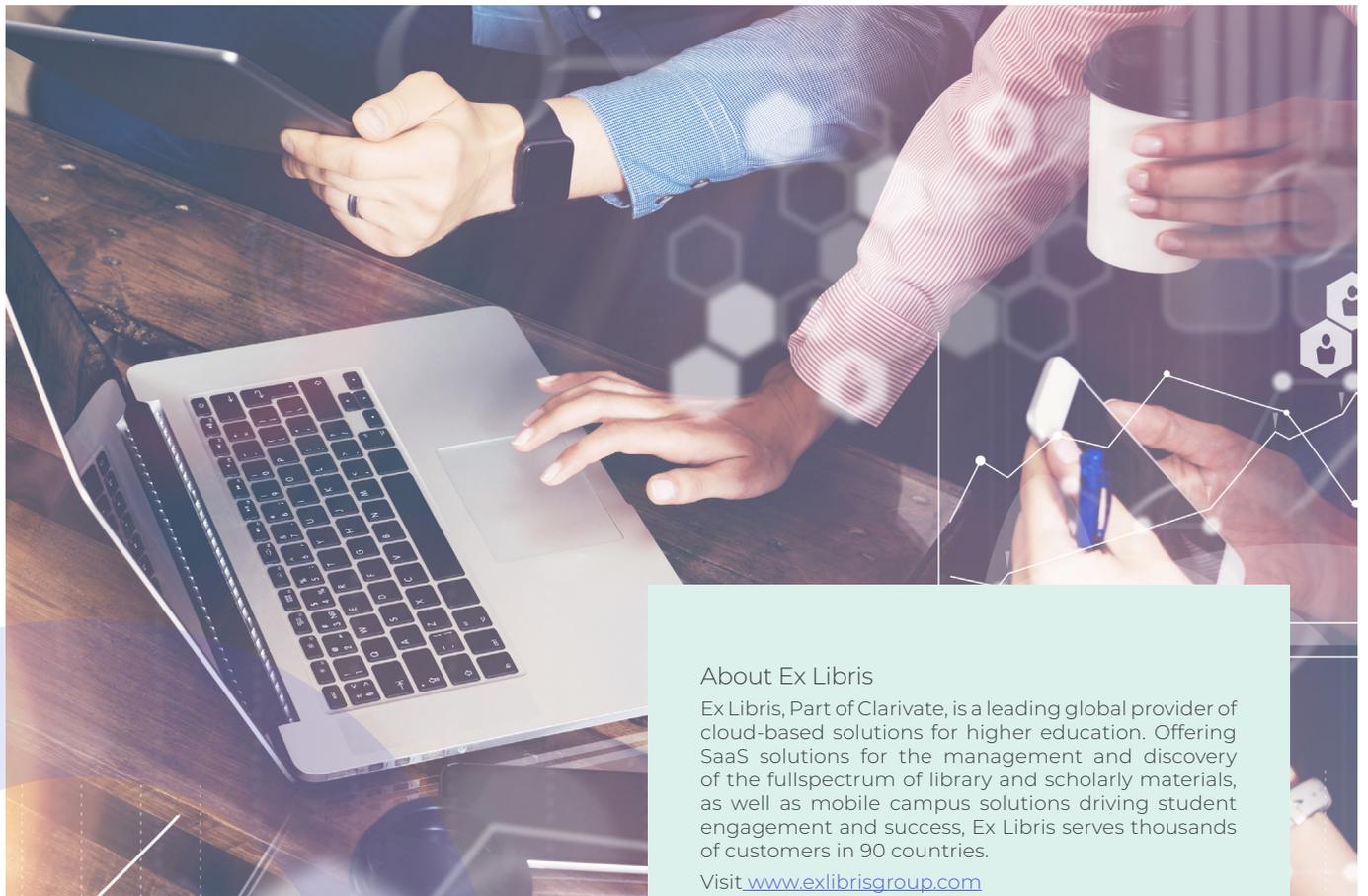
Collaboration with Ex Libris was “excellent,” according to Jürgen. “We were starting something pretty new, with a lot of unknown challenges, but we were exploring it together with Ex Libris. We saw them as more of a partner than a vendor, which is not something we automatically expect.”

The SLSP team praised the Ex Libris project management personnel, who were very eager to learn about SLSP’s needs. Jeanette noted the frequent meetings, responsiveness and flexibility of the Ex Libris team, saying there were “spontaneous calls where we could really discuss the issues, and find solutions together, as there was an understanding of both the system and our library structure and requirements.”

Thomas considers it “actually amazing that we managed to keep to our go-live deadline, which was thanks to both our great team and our great partner in Ex Libris.”

SLSP adapted the training provided by Ex Libris during the implementation phase and created its own program. All the librarians in the network underwent the SLSP training to obtain certification for the different functional areas. In part, the adaptations were necessary due to language barriers and to cover new aspects of cataloging and other aspects of working together in a consortium.

Finally, SLSP has benefited immensely from the forums for the larger Alma community, where users around the world share ideas, tips, best practices and experiences to help one another and expand each other’s horizons.



### About Ex Libris

Ex Libris, Part of Clarivate, is a leading global provider of cloud-based solutions for higher education. Offering SaaS solutions for the management and discovery of the full spectrum of library and scholarly materials, as well as mobile campus solutions driving student engagement and success, Ex Libris serves thousands of customers in 90 countries.

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