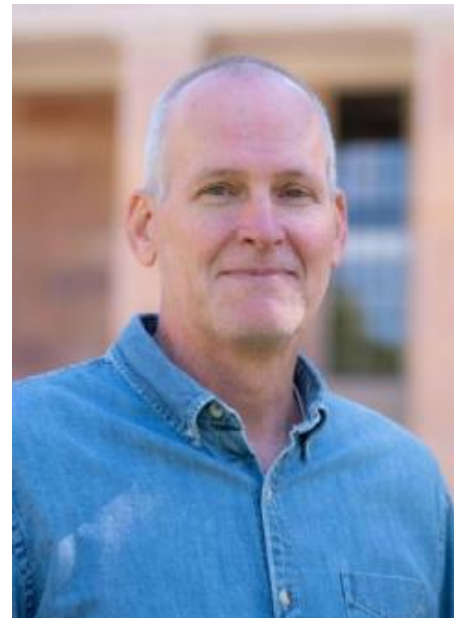# FOLIO, openness and choice and the future of libraries

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The acquisition of Innovative Interfaces by Ex Libris/ProQuest is just the most recent incident of consolidation in the library vendor marketplace. While Ex Libris has a strong record of supporting products it has attained through business acquisitions, libraries should be concerned about this development's impact upon competition and should be taking steps to ensure that the choices in the library LSP marketplace do not become even more limited.

The University of Colorado Boulder (CU Boulder) has been an Innovative Interfaces customer for more than twenty years and has no near-term plan to migrate to a new system. However, the university has been a member of the Open Library Environment (OLE) and a contributor to the development of FOLIO since 2017. This engagement with OLE and FOLIO honours the expectations for preferring content and supporting technologies that are open, interoperable, universally designed, and prioritise user privacy that are expressed in the CU Boulder Libraries' strategic plan.

Individuals in the libraries contributing to the development of FOLIO cite a number of reasons for being excited to do so. These reasons include the fact that FOLIO is an open source tool being developed by an innovative collaboration of libraries, developers, and vendors; that the modular design and extensibility of the platform will allow libraries to choose components and workflows that they desire and not be forced to work with a bundled set of services; that FOLIO is being built with an eye for moving beyond MARC; and that they want to contribute to building solutions into FOLIO rather than developing workarounds for our current system. I support the libraries' engagement in FOLIO for all of these reasons, but I also believe that the development of a successful FOLIO LSP will make for a more vibrant library technology marketplace.

Libraries, and many vendors, benefit from a library technology marketplace where there are high quality tools to choose from and where options to enter into innovative partnerships

exist. With open source products in the mix, libraries looking for value in a new LSP can go beyond feature and cost comparisons and also consider:

- the ability to customise the system
- options for service and support from multiple competing vendors
- the potential for integration with other campus systems or partners' systems
- the availability of one's own data for future migrations or other uses

While 'open source' can suggest a need for sophisticated information technology departments and additional staff, FOLIO has succeeded in creating an ecosystem that enables organisations of all sizes to take advantage of the benefits that open source software can offer. Libraries opting for FOLIO will have a number of models for implementing and maintaining the platform, including managing the installation and hosting the software in-house or outsourcing some or all of the work to vendors. Early adopters include not only research-intensive institutions but also national libraries, small colleges, and consortia. FOLIO's easily customisable modular design is also attracting interest from public libraries.

There have been a number of successful open source library projects but the international community rallying around FOLIO is truly remarkable. The growing list of early implementers includes Chalmers University of Technology in Sweden; Cornell University and the Five College Consortium in the United States; the State and University Library Bremen and ZBW – Leibniz Information Centre for Economics in Germany; and the National Széchényi Library in Hungary. The efforts of a large number of library professionals are beginning to come to fruition. This success is due in large part to the efforts and resources OLE and others have put into building a sustainable community infrastructure that's both practical and welcoming.

I urge librarians and library organisations to make an investment in supporting the continued development of this open source project if only to ensure that the marketplace for library systems does not become even more monopolistic. It is very difficult for corporate executives to justify investing in product enhancements or bowing to pressure around issues of privacy, data management, and vendor lock-in if there are no viable alternatives. We have the opportunity today to go beyond voting with our dollars for a less than perfect solution and actually create a platform that reflects our needs and values — one that cannot get gobbled up in a corporate acquisition.

There are a number of options for individuals, libraries, consortia, and vendors to engage in the project. Developers, product owners, subject matter experts, testers, and UX/UI designers interested in joining in FOLIO development should review the information available on the FOLIO blog and wiki.

These views are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the views of UKSG.