



The Royal Danish Library

Supporting and streamlining services at a uniquely complex national library

Photo Credit: Laura Stamer and the Royal Danish Library



Alma and Primo help Denmark's largest library consolidate resource management for five key universities, support a network of academic institutions, centralize interlibrary loan for public libraries, and preserve the nation's heritage for all.

“Ex Libris helped us meet our strategic goals of merging various library systems into a coherent whole, with a platform of common infrastructure supporting Danish research and university libraries.” Knut Bøckman, Senior Advisor for Library Systems



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About the Royal Danish Library

The Royal Danish Library, founded in 1648, is the national library of Denmark. As such, it is a repository for cultural heritage collections and an internal library for the Central Government Administration, as well as an interlibrary hub for the public libraries across Denmark's 100 municipalities. In addition, the Royal Danish Library partners with four universities to provide centralized library administration and development for the University of Copenhagen, Aarhus University, Roskilde University, and the IT University of Copenhagen. It also provides library services for the Danish School of Media and Journalism.

The Royal Danish Library employs approximately 800 people in 30 locations, making it the largest library staff in Denmark. About 270 employees work in Aarhus, in the Jutland region of Denmark, and the rest in the greater Copenhagen area.

Unifying Services at a Multifaceted Organization

The Royal Danish Library is an unusual institution, serving the public in many distinct roles across multiple collaborative relationships.

As an organization, it has locations across Denmark to provide university library services to five institutions of higher education (the University of Copenhagen, Aarhus University, Roskilde University, the IT University of Copenhagen, and the Danish School of Media and Journalism). This is not a consortium in the traditional sense; rather, the libraries of those institutions operate essentially as integrated branches of the Royal Danish Library. In addition, the national library has a traditional consortium relationship with other universities for other types of cooperation and coordination.

The Royal Danish Library also serves as a hub for the nation's public libraries, as an important participant in the shared, centrally updated interlibrary loan system. While each of Denmark's 100 municipalities has its own library, which collaborate with each other, the Royal Danish Library is obligated to be the lender of last resort. In addition, the Royal Danish Library usually handles international interlibrary loans on behalf of the public libraries.

Alma and Primo bring coherence to complexity

In 2019, the Royal Danish Library adopted several Ex Libris solutions to help reorganize and optimize its multifaceted services.

Ex Libris Primo, the patron-facing discovery service, provides centralized and personalized access to students and faculty from all of the five academic institutions supported by the Royal Danish Library, and to unaffiliated public users.

The Royal Danish Library also performs centralized management of collections held by the five academic libraries, as well as the national library itself, with Ex Libris Alma. The platform, providing unified services for print, electronic and digital materials, was configured to treat all the libraries as if they are branch campuses of one institution.

In addition, the Royal Danish Library established an Alma Network Zone for collaboration among independent university libraries throughout Denmark. The network, set up for sharing bibliographic records, includes partners like the Aalborg

University, Copenhagen Business School, the Copenhagen School of Professional Services, and others.

Strategic Successes

The Royal Danish Library has been systematically achieving several strategic objectives with the help of its Alma and Primo solutions.

Integration

“Alma played a very big part in the merger that has shaped the Royal Danish Library, including the catalogs and library services management,” according to Knut Bøckman, Senior Advisor for Library Systems. “The State Library of Aarhus and the Royal Library of Copenhagen were officially merged into one institution, but we still used three different library systems that we had to integrate. Each incoming partner had national library duties and served separate academic communities; obligations that needed to be carried over and streamlined in a unified library system. Alma’s configuration flexibility has made it possible for us to work with such a complex organization.”

Alma’s comprehensive capabilities are also particularly important for the Royal Danish Library as an institution of cultural history. As Knut put it, “Alma has certainly helped us to efficiently maintain special collections and adapt the system to unique quirks of archiving built up over hundreds of years.”

Differentiation

Print collections are borrowed freely among all the institutional libraries managed by the Royal Danish Library; however, electronic resources require a sharing arrangement that takes into account different types of licenses and each university’s needs. While all the electronic resources are administered by the Royal Danish Library, each university only pays for access for its own student and faculty in accordance with separate licensing terms.

“We need to know exactly what remote access rights a particular student or faculty has for each electronic resource,” Knut noted.

The Royal Danish Library also negotiates and manages nationwide licenses, some of which are administered for consortium partner institutions in the shared platform.

“The ability to coherently manage these various constellations of licenses and patron types was one of the main reasons we selected Alma,” Knut said.

Collaboration

Alma helped meet yet another strategic goal of the Royal Danish Library, which was also a request from the Danish Ministry of Culture, by providing a common library system infrastructure for the nation’s research and higher education institutions.

“That’s what we’re doing with the Alma Network Zone we set up,” Knut said.

Member institutions can easily discover what resources are held by others in the network, if an item is available, and its full metadata. This cross-institution visibility has alleviated unnecessary duplication of effort among librarians and interlibrary loan bottlenecks at the networked facilities.

Migration, Training, Implementation and Support

The Royal Danish Library’s adoption of Alma and Primo created a merger of institutions with common workflows, rules and a library service spanning most of the country. At the same time, the library undertook a cataloging format conversion (from denMARC to MARC21) of 14 million records. Ex Libris performed the conversions based on official mapping documentation accounting for local and variable cataloging practices. In addition, the library worked closely with the Alma development team to ensure communication among all its academic partners over the national interlibrary loan infrastructure, running on the ISO18626 protocol.

“It was a big complex project,” Knut said, “partly because we were moving from three different Aleph instances, two different SFX instances and one 360 instance into the same Alma system, while at the same time implementing a format change for our bibliographic records. Throughout, we were taken care of very well by Ex Libris consultants and the project management team.”

The Royal Danish Library makes use of Alma’s tools for ongoing independent learning, assistance and user training. This includes sharing materials from training areas of the documentation portal when librarians from collaborating libraries request help, the “Help for This Page” search – which Knut called “really ingenious and really helpful” – and training webinars.

“Overall,” Knut said, “we are happy with technical support. The cases we escalate are always taken very seriously by Ex Libris and, if we categorize a support case as high priority, it is looked into pretty quickly.”

Knut also noted his team’s “great appreciation of ongoing Alma analytics, which has proven useful for day-to-day work and also for keeping things in order.”



Photo Credit: The Royal Danish Library

Current and Future Alma-based Projects

“Right now, we are in the midst of a huge project, in which we are rearranging all our 16 million physical holdings to reflect the Alma physical data model,” Knut said. This means moving print items to different locations and adjusting local processes accordingly.

Another development currently underway is an increase in the number of academic and research libraries connected through the Royal Danish Library's Alma network zone.

As part of the ongoing strategic goal of further uniting Denmark's libraries, the Royal Danish Library is in the process of testing a fulfillment network for the consortium libraries. Patrons will be able to request items from any consortium library directly from within their own organization's Primo discovery interface.

“Ex Libris Alma has helped foster a close relationship with and among our whole library community, which is really unique,” Knut concluded, “and which we fully expect to expand and deepen as time goes on.”



Photo Credit: Karsten Bundgaard and the Royal Danish Library

About Ex Libris, Part of Clarivate

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