Montana NCIP Home Delivery Report

Overview

In 2006, OCLC, the State Library of Montana and 12 libraries (10 public libraries, one community college library, one K-12 school) in Montana embarked on a pilot project to test the effectiveness of using the NISO Circulation Interchange Protocol (NCIP), [http://ncip.envisionware.com/](http://ncip.envisionware.com/), between WorldCat Resource Sharing and their local systems. Montana was chosen because its libraries and OCLC shared a comparable vision: single discovery, unmediated requesting and delivery direct-to-user. Initially, Montana was interested in gaining support for the Montana Library Card.

Ten libraries\(^1\) were participants in the Montana Shared Catalog (MSC), based on SirsiDynix Unicorn as their local system. These ten libraries participated in both the NCIP and home delivery parts of the pilot.

Two libraries\(^2\) were part of the HiLine Library System, each using SirsiDynix Horizon as its library system. These two libraries were unable to participate in the NCIP portion of the pilot, but did participate in home delivery.

OCLC requirements for participation

Libraries wishing to participate in the pilot had to agree to the following:

- Each library had to be an OCLC member and a supplier on the WorldCat Resource Sharing system.
- Use an NCIP server for each ILS and obtain NCIP certification by SirsiDynix.
- Agree to allow all BORROWING/LENDING requests to be fulfilled via WorldCat Delivery’s NCIP methodology, if possible, within their defined group using WorldCat Resource Sharing.
- Support the need for user registration via “My Account” in the OCLC FirstSearch service for the purpose of obtaining identification information from the user's library to assure user is in good standing to request services.
- Allow user-initiated requesting using either the FirstSearch interface or their local OPAC and Direct Request functionality to send requests to WorldCat Resource Sharing for processing.
- Agree to provide feedback on all aspects of the pilot, including interface design, documentation, training materials and additional features necessary to go from pilot to service offering.

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\(^1\) Missoula Public Library, Miles Community College Library, Miles City Public Library, Whitehall Community Library, Drummond School Community Library, Dillon City Library, Hearst Free Library (Anaconda), Polson City Library, Glendive Public Library, Bitterroot Public Library,

\(^2\) Havre-Hill County Library, Liberty County, Chester
Goals

Both OCLC and the State Library of Montana had specific goals entering into the pilot.

**OCLC’s goals for this project were:**

- Test NCIP functionality between WorldCat Resource Sharing and various local systems. Many ILS vendors claim to have some level of NCIP in their systems\(^1\). However, we needed to explore how viable an option NCIP is.
- Expose libraries and users to home delivery. In this context, we wanted to determine how much interest there was in home delivery, what users stated they would be willing to pay and how important this service was to them.
- Learn about the logistics of the service.
  - How long would shipping take?
  - What systems and processes needed to be in place, including metering equipment, packaging materials, and marketing materials?
  - What would postage cost?
- Help libraries determine how much to budget and how much to charge their users.
- Learn how workflows would be affected.

**The State Library of Montana goals were:**

- For NCIP authentication to work seamlessly for users. This included user validation and circulation.
- For home delivery to become a viable option.
- Learn more about courier services, moving Montana toward a single delivery system via courier.
- Gain legislative and local support for a ‘Montana Library card’; not an actual, physical card, but the infrastructure to offer uninterrupted library services to users across Montana. The State Library wanted to test extending the services offered to MSC libraries to library users from other parts of the state using disparate library systems. These benefits include unmediated discovery and requesting of materials and rapid delivery of materials. In the case of the pilot, this meant delivery to the requestor’s home/office address rather than to the library.

To determine success, OCLC provided user-feedback surveys that libraries distributed with each item sent to a user’s home.

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\(^1\) Sample vendor-NCIP compliance
Process

NCIP was conceived to make disparate circulation systems have some level of interoperability. This pilot project was designed to test the messages allowing check-in, check-out, renew, cancel and determining a user in good standing. When working properly, NCIP is designed to save staff time and speed up delivery of materials to library users. While many systems use some flavor of NCIP, to date, messaging is not compliant across systems and extensive testing needs to be done in order for messaging to be successful.

How NCIP works

1. Users are authenticated by their library via NCIP to ensure that they are in good standing to receive services
2. Users generate requests via WorldCat Resource Sharing or their library’s ILS which, is routed via NCIP messages to lending libraries’ local systems for fulfillment.
3. When a system is located that has the item on the shelf, the request is fulfilled in WorldCat Resource Sharing and a check-out is performed in that system.
4. If the item is a returnable, it is returned in WorldCat Resource Sharing/ILLiad and a message is sent to the local system to check in the item.

If the request cannot be filled by a Remote Circulation participant, the request is automatically routed via WorldCat Resource Sharing as a “traditional” ILL request. By doing this, neither the user nor staff have to create an additional request.

Libraries used the home delivery component of the pilot in tandem with NCIP to ship items from lending library directly to borrowing users.

Home delivery postage concerns

When the libraries were first approached with the idea of adding home delivery to the original NCIP pilot project, libraries expressed concern about being able to provide funding for the postage. Lending libraries sending materials to the borrowing library’s end user would be paying for the material to get to the user as well as return postage in the form of a postage-paid mailer included in the original envelope. To address this concern, OCLC obtained $100,000 in strategic funding to pay for postage and all marketing, packaging materials and postage machine supplies.

OCLC contracted with Neopost to provide postage-paid machines for each library. Postage was deposited into an OCLC account and when a library ran low on postage, more funds were transferred into individual library accounts.
Results

- During the 12-month pilot, approximately 18,000 items were shipped to library patrons.
- Approximately 14,500 of these items (80%) were supplied by the Missoula Public Library.
- Despite the inclusion of postage-paid return envelopes, 15% of items were returned to the borrowing library rather than being sent directly to the lending library. Library users often returned the envelope with the item, so in those instances, the borrowing library was able to return the item to the lender and postage was not wasted. When users returned items to their home library without the postage-paid return envelope the borrowing library had to pay for return postage.

Pilot challenges

**Home delivery with NCIP functionality:** When NCIP worked, significant workflow savings were realized. However, it required staff to learn new workflows, and allow NCIP to work as designed and trust that it was working properly.

**Home delivery without NCIP functionality:** In October 2007, OCLC and the State Library began looking for patterns of when NCIP wasn’t working properly. There were two issues that arose:

- NCIP placing holds on incorrect items in shared user environments, i.e., among consortial libraries that offer shared user privileges.
- MSC has duplicates records in the database and NCIP wasn’t smart enough to choose the better record.

After OCLC had made all the available changes on its end, NCIP problems persisted. Jointly, OCLC, the State Library and pilot participants agreed to turn off NCIP functionality in December 2007. This required additional workflow changes on the part of library staff. Libraries that had experienced workflow savings using NCIP no longer had these benefits and had to unlearn specific workflows.

**Staff effort:** The staff survey conducted in April/May showed that all libraries had a significant increase in staff time required to process resource sharing requests; 46% of staff participants stated that they were dissatisfied with offering the service. When probed further, their dissatisfaction did not lie with home delivery itself, but additional staff time involved with managing the service. When NCIP testing and home delivery were both active and libraries were troubleshooting NCIP issues, Missoula Public Library staff spent an extra 3½–4 hours daily managing requests. The goal at the outset of this project was to ultimately reduce workflow management time by 3–4 hours.
Due date passed from WCRS to ILS: Requests in WorldCat Resource Sharing “age” at approximately 1:00 am EST. Montana is in the Mountain Time Zone, two hours behind EST. ‘Aging’ is the process of moving to the next lender or becoming overdue. This time disparity results in requests either moving to the next lender a day earlier than expected or becoming overdue. The standard time for WorldCat Resource Sharing had to be synchronized with the Unicorn systems in order for all systems to be working on the same clock.

Changes in library staff’s workflow: In particular, this concerned separating items bound for home delivery. Since some of the MSC libraries with permission to set holds were not participating in home delivery, it took lending staff extra effort to distinguish, sort and manage materials differently depending on an item’s destination.

Pilot successes

Users loved the home delivery option (see below).

Library staff loved being able to provide the home delivery option. Several libraries stated that once funding had expired, they still wanted to provide the service either to their entire population or to segments of their population.

Users from communities outside the pilot expressed interest in home delivery service and signed up for library cards in order to obtain home delivery.

When NCIP worked as designed, library staff experienced a significant time savings.

Pilot participants were very supportive of the concept of central user authentication via OCLC and home delivery as an option.

OCLC and SirsiDynix reaffirmed their support and commitment of standards and their willingness to work with each other.
User experiences

Overwhelmingly, users love home delivery; 90% stated that they were very pleased with the service and would recommend it to others.

Sixty percent of users stated they were willing to pay for home delivery and were willing to pay in the $5.00 range either per delivery or per item.

Sixty-six percent of users thought they would use the service at least monthly.

Users were unwilling to give up current library services.

Over 70% of users said they chose home delivery because of its convenience.

- 33% of users lived between 1–5 miles from the library.
- 22% lived 6–10 miles from the library.
- 20% lived 11–25 miles from the library.
- 12% lived over 25 miles away.
Conclusions

NCIP

NCIP is not ready for prime time with respect to vendor interoperability. As described above, NCIP is not plug-and-play. A significant amount of testing and development is required in order to get disparate systems to interoperate seamlessly.

OCLC’s plans for NCIP

OCLC is offering NCIP as an option for WorldCat Local and WorldCat Navigator. We have proven that there are workflow savings to be had with circulation interoperability. OCLC continues to pursue partnerships with ILS vendors and we’re working to fill gaps where those partnerships do not exist.

Delivery

Home delivery is not a service unto itself. It needs to be woven into existing services (resource sharing, ILS) to gain acceptance in libraries. As a stand-alone service, there is no feasible method to involve multiple libraries with multiple tracking and shipping services and have the service remain simple for users. For this service to be successful policies and procedures must be held in common.

OCLC’s plans for home delivery

OCLC is not currently pursuing home delivery as an independent service. Instead, we’re inserting hooks for home delivery into current services, where we’ve determined it belongs. This includes tracking capabilities for the major carrier services (DHL, FedEx, UPS, USPS) in our resource sharing services (WorldCat Resource Sharing, ILLiad and in the future, WorldCat Navigator).

OCLC would like to provide a home delivery option for libraries willing to ship materials directly to their borrowing partners’ users. OCLC’s home delivery option will be built around a lending library shipping items directly to borrowing library users and those users then returning the items to their home library. This obviates the problem of lending libraries paying for their own return shipping. This optional service supports ALA’s Interlibrary Loan Code for the United States4, section 5.7:

The supplying library should ship material in a timely and efficient manner to the location specified by the requesting library.

We are investigating the addition of home delivery in WorldCat Navigator. A consortia resource sharing solution is the ideal environment in which to launch a home delivery solution. Consortia have similar policies, and often have shared users and even shared collections.

OCLC continues to investigate end-user payment services, allowing libraries to recoup the cost of providing a home delivery service using credit cards or IFM.

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4 http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/rusa/resources/guidelines/interlibrary.cfm