

**CCL-EAR Committee Review of  
SERIALS SOLUTIONS  
October 2004**

In September and October 2004, selected members of the California Council of Chief Librarians, Electronic Access and Resources Committee (CCL-EAR) undertook a “hands-on” review of the E-Journal Access & Management Suite from Serials Solutions.

Serials Solutions (SS) provides a number of online serials management tools to maximize access to full-text content in aggregator databases. Its flagship product, the E-Journal A.M.S. (Access & Management Suite) includes an A to Z list of full-text journal titles, customized for each library, a Journal Linker, with linking to the content in the library’s databases, and an E-Journal Portal. Add-on products include MARC Records for aggregated titles, and Article Linker, a hosted, OpenURL link resolver.

Review Process

Selected members of the CCL-EAR Committee, independently or in concert with other qualified professionals on their campus library staffs, reviewed and evaluated *Serials Solutions*. Assessments were submitted on a Review Reply Form specifically designed by the committee for this purpose.

Though other staff may have helped in the review process, completion of the form was by the CCL-EAR committee member(s) only and not transferred to others. Ratings were based upon the potential value of the proposal to the California Community Colleges as a whole and not solely on the needs of any specific campus.

Attributes of the information resources were assessed on a scale of 1 to 4 with 1 representing the “least value” and 4 representing the “most value.”

The following attributes were examined:

**INFORMATION DATABASE**

Consider its functionality, the appropriateness of format (bibliographic/full-text), the content of the information, the adequacy of coverage (retrospective, current), and its value to the California Community Colleges as a whole.

**SEARCH INTERFACE**

Consider the functionality and ease of use of the interface. Is it intuitive or is an excessive amount of training required? Are any crucial features missing from the search interface?

**USER SUPPORT SERVICES**

If documentation is required for successful use of the product, is it available, comprehensive, and well written? Is online help adequate and user friendly? Does vendor supply training if it is needed? Is a telephone help line available?

## COST

If cost is available, does it seem reasonable in terms of comparable products?

## ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICE

Is access/connection to product reliable and stable? Is response time adequate?

## OVERALL ASSESSMENT

#1 ---- No Support

#2 ---- No Support at this time. Future support conditional upon enhancements noted below in Comments Section.

#3 ---- Support and Recommend proposal be forwarded to California Community College libraries for their acceptance or rejection. Would like to see enhancements in product noted below in Comments Section.

#4 ---- Outstanding offer and opportunity. Recommend proposal be forwarded to California Community College campus libraries or their acceptance or rejection.

Following are the results of the CCL-EAR Committee's review as well as comments taken from the individual Review Reply Forms.

## **Information Database 4,4,3,4**

The Serials Solutions E-Journal Access Management Suite allows students to search in one place for the full-text of a particular journal instead of having to search multiple databases. Not only is searching more efficient for students, but library staff save time by eliminating the need to update individual catalog records or holdings lists as content changes. Serials Solutions provides information from 100 content providers, encompassing more than 700 databases. This number includes virtually every database offered by the CCLC that includes complete full-text coverage of periodical titles. Those databases that selectively include periodical articles, e.g. SIRS, Newsbank Newsfile, etc., are not included, nor are encyclopedia or other non-periodical type databases. (For a complete listing of databases and publishers covered by Serials Solutions visit <http://www.serialssolutions.com/databases.asp>.)

Serials Solutions produces the customized lists by merging journal title lists provided by database vendors. Libraries simply submit a list of full-text article databases to which they subscribe, and access to their A to Z list is set up through the E-Journal A.M.S. Libraries can also incorporate their print journal holdings into the list by sending a spreadsheet of titles and holdings to SS. The portal allows the library administrator to add and delete databases and customize holdings information, with changes taking effect by the next working day. From the A to Z list, journal title-level links are provided in most cases with database-level linking for others. The A-to-Z list can be hosted by Serials Solutions, or reports can be downloaded for local control in various formats (HTML, PDF, EXCEL, or MARC-ready). For an additional fee, article-level linking is available via Article Linker, as are MARC records.

Linking is fairly seamless on the library end but there are a few vendor links which require customization. SS tech support is available for help when needed. Database content can only be as accurate as the information provided by the database vendor. Some vendors are better than others at updating their title lists on a regular and frequent basis. As a result, there will be times when a title will be listed as available on the SS list, but the content has been deleted from the vendor's database and the vendor's title list has not been recently updated. SS staff encourage the reporting of such discrepancies so they can work with the database vendors to correct the information.

Subscription to the Full Marc Records service includes serial records for your OPAC for full-text journals in databases to which the library subscribes. Records can be standard or customized, and updated regularly to add, modify and delete records. This service can be integrated into most of the standard integrated library systems, including Dynix, Endeavor, Ex Libris, Innovative Interfaces, Sanderson, and Sirsi.

## **Search Interface 4,4,3,4**

The search interface for E-Journal A.M.S. is very simple and straightforward, and accomplishes its intended purpose with a minimum of confusion. Journals can be

searched by title, either exact or keyword, and by ISSN. Truncation is only available in the keyword search. The A to Z list is also browsable. In partnership with Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, journals can be browsed by subject using Ulrich's subject headings. For libraries that also subscribe to Ulrich's online, bi-directional linking is available at no additional cost.

From the aggregator database, links can be embedded in article retrievals that take the searcher to the journal title in the SS list, which then indicates if and where the journal can be accessed with hot links to the corresponding database. In most cases, the link is to the journal level within the database, which requires students to then click on a journal issue link and look for their article. Some products, e.g. Gale's Literature Resource Center, only allow database-level links so students must repeat the search for their article in the database. These journal-level links from the basic product are not date-specific so there will be times when a student will follow the link to the SS list and find that the library does not have or provide access to the particular date of the needed article.

With Article Linker, a hosted, OpenURL link resolver, the link from one database to the next is at the article level and, therefore, date-specific. This linking can be set up in one of two ways: 1) The link from the journal citation goes to an intermediate page which lists all of the places where the article can be accessed. If available online, there are links to the article, journal, or database levels. If available in the library's print collection, the link goes to the journal entry in the library's OPAC. This intermediate page also allows libraries to include customized links to, for example, online reference or interlibrary loan forms. 2) Libraries can also opt to bypass the intermediate page by using the 1-Click to Article feature, which goes to the best available link. (Note: some database vendors allow direct linking to the article, while others link to an intermediate page which then allows linking to the article)

#### **User Support Services 4,4,2,4**

Serials Solutions has an exceptionally easy-to-use web site ([www.serialssolutions.com](http://www.serialssolutions.com)) with contact information for customer and technical support (8-6 PST), a description of their products with real-life links to examples in subscribing libraries, and an administrative module, called the Client Center, where changes can be made at the local level. E-Journal A.M.S. lacks any help screens for the user, but the interface is so simple and straightforward that they do not seem necessary. There is extensive help for the library manager in the Client Center. The local administrator can add branding to the search interface and results, and customize library-specific data including holdings information, database names, and URLs. A basic tutorial is provided with links to more detailed technical support. Usage statistics are available broken down by type of search, along with a benchmarking tool that includes a list of "Best Practices for Increasing E-Journal Use". A Frequently Asked Questions web page addresses Library Information and Services as well as Databases and Select Journals.

"Overlap Analysis" is a recently added service (at no extra charge) that is a unique and innovative tool for collection management. It allows the comparison of full-text content

between two or more databases. The analysis indicates how many and which titles and holdings are duplicated and which ones are unique. Comparisons can be done not only on the library's currently subscribed databases, but on any database that Serials Solutions tracks. Overlap Analysis and Usage Statistics can be extremely useful to justify periodicals collection development decisions and to defend budget requirements for online databases.

### **Cost 4,3,4,4**

The cost of E-Journal A.M.S is a bargain, especially when purchased through a consortium. A library could easily spend much more in staff time trying to duplicate this information in-house. Recent enhancements such as overlap analysis make this service extremely important for collection development. In 2004, Serials Solutions reduced the cost of their basic product considerably for community colleges and added a two-tiered structure for initial start-ups and for renewals.

The cost of Full Marc Records is considerably higher. While the advantage of having catalog records in your online catalog for all titles in your subscription databases is clear, most community college students will probably do their periodical research through database search screens rather than the catalog.

The cost of Article Linker is reasonable, taking into consideration that it is entirely hosted by Serials Solutions and requires no hardware or software purchases by the library.

### **Accessibility of Service 4,4,4,4**

Serials Solutions has proven to be an extremely reliable service. Its simplicity and straightforward design make it a stable part of the library's online resource infrastructure. None of the reviewers have experienced any down time, and most report quick response times and equally reliable access from on- and off-campus.

### **Overall Assessment 4,3.5 ,4,4**

Serials Solutions is a valuable tool and does what it set out to do: make life a little easier for the librarian. Instead of juggling several periodical holdings lists, and having to make time to update each of them, SS brings them together in one collection. It provides users (librarians or otherwise) with basic search functions that quickly determine whether the library has access to a particular magazine or journal in full-text. This clearly saves time and the information is generally accurate and up-to-date. For this reason alone, Serials Solutions is a welcome addition to any library. Yet Serials Solutions does do a bit more. By offering hyperlinks to the available subscription databases, it goes beyond managing the periodicals collection. It can actually facilitate the patron's information quest through its browsing capabilities. Such searching can reveal a cross-section of library holdings that otherwise may be overlooked. In short, Serials Solutions has the potential to be an

important part of the library – both for the librarian and the patron alike. E-Journal A.M.S. is an absolute bargain for any library that subscribes to multiple databases and wishes to have title lists available. For campuses with full-text products consolidated with one vendor, SS would still be useful for incorporating online and print holdings into one list. It is a straightforward product that is continually being enhanced and improved. Full Marc Records is also a valuable product, but in one reviewer's opinion less in demand, and must therefore be weighed against the considerable cost of the product.

In the past, Serials Solutions has been “independently oriented”—i.e. not owned by any of the content providers. However, they have recently been purchased by ProQuest, and it is unclear whether this will eventually change the orientation of their services.

#### **Utility for Home Campus 4,4 4,4,**

I cannot imagine being without the E-Journal A.M.S. in my library. I would also like to purchase the Full Marc Records product, but cannot justify the cost under our current budget constraints.

Before we subscribed to Serials Solutions, we had to look in 5 different places to see if we could access a journal. We now have everything in one place and can make changes overnight. Probably the best investment we have made in many years.