

Report of the Executive Director Stephen Elfstrand

To the MnPALS Annual Meeting 03/17/08

When I began as Executive Director in August of 2007, I had four main goals for my first 6-9 months. First, to get to know the PALS staff, the roles they play and the strengths they bring to the organization; second, to acquaint myself with the MnPALS consortium, its membership, history, culture and operations. Third, to understand the environments, political, financial and technological, in which we all work here in Minnesota; and finally, to try to build a consensus among the stakeholders about the future directions we will be taking together. While doing this, I always try to keep in mind the ultimate goal, the reason we are all doing what we do: to help our students and staffs achieve academic, career and life success.

I'm looking forward to meeting the Deans, Directors and Coordinators of the MnPALS Consortium at the Annual Meeting, some of you perhaps for the first time. Thanks to Orrin Ausen, Chair of the MnPALS Executive Committee for organizing this meeting and also for scheduling time today to explore together significant issues affecting the future direction of the consortium.

Organization and Management

The PALS Organization Study (Sept. 2007) made recommendations concerning organizational structure and the need to provide new services to our users. Toward those ends, I have created a new position, that of Innovation Coordinator. Linda Richter has graciously agreed to serve in this capacity.

Linda's background, as an administrator, as well as a programmer and computer scientist, makes her an ideal fit for this position. She also believes, as I do, that new products and services are crucial to the successful future we all want for the consortium and the PALS office.

We will take a team-based approach to innovation, so this unit consists of a number of "Innovation Teams" which are centered on new products and services, and staffed by people drawn from throughout the rest of the organization. Individuals on multiple teams may play different roles in different teams: for instance, they might be the team leader on one and a technical consultant on another. Team sizes and membership will vary; in small teams one person might play more than one role, i.e., team lead and application specialist, whereas in a large team there may be many application specialists. The goal is that everyone in the PALS organization will participate on the Innovation Teams including coordinators and the Executive Director. The roles played by people assigned to an innovation team will not necessarily reflect their position elsewhere in the organizational hierarchy; for instance, someone who is not a coordinator may play the team lead role.

For right now, I'm leaving the Technical Services and Support Services units in place. Bringing change while maintaining continuity is the reasoning behind this decision, but I haven't ruled out the possibility

of using the team approach there also in the future. The innovation teams will provide us with some experiential knowledge on how a team-based approach works in our environment, and inform our decision about whether this approach might work on the operations side too.

At the February Executive Committee meeting, a motion was passed encouraging us to spend a significant amount of time on new products and services, and investigate options for the next ILS. I have authorized everyone on the PALS Staff to spend up to 20% of their time on Innovation Team activities as requested by the Innovation Coordinator or Team Leaders. So, of course that will mean that we will have less time to spend on Aleph. At the present time we have three teams: Discovery Tools, OpenURL Link Resolver and Open Source ILS.

In addition, I have appointed a Strategic Planning committee to begin a formal process of envisioning the future while staying true to our heritage and values. Please find the charge for this team appended.

In order to enhance communication with our membership, we have formed a Communications Team which is looking into how the consortium and the PALS staff communicate. They are looking at message types, communication channels, audience segments and preferences. The Communications Team is using a model based around the difference between “receiving” and “retrieving”. For instance some people like information delivered to them by email, they prefer “receiving”, whereas others want to go and get the information they want when they want it and prefer to minimize the amount of general information they get automatically, they are “retrieving”.

We have consolidated the mailing lists as requested by the User Council and Executive Committee which should limit the number of duplicate messages and allow users to filter messages using their email client. Implementing WIKI and Forum software should help with information overload too. Rather than send out all information on the mailing lists, much of it will be placed on the Forum or WIKI. Users can retrieve information when they choose or selectively set up Forum topics or WIKI pages to notify them when new information becomes available so they may go and retrieve it, or at the user’s discretion, the notification can include that actual text of the addition or change in the email and they can just “receive” it.

Nothing really beats face-to-face communication and to help facilitate that, PALS staff has re-instituted a site visit program. The site visits have been interesting and informative for PALS staff and well received by the libraries. We will continue this program next year. If you would like a site visit please let us know.

Site visits by the Executive Director

- South Central College
- Southwest Minnesota State University
- St. Cloud State University

- St. Cloud Technical College
- St. John's University & College of St. Benedict
- Gustavus Adolphus College
- Minnesota State University, Mankato
- Traverse des Sioux Regional Library System

Todd and I had a special meeting with the directors of the private academic institutions in the MnPALS Consortium. We felt it was vital to hear what this important constituency had to say, what their expectations are for the future, and explore how the PALS Office can serve them better.

Site visits by PALS Staff

- St. Cloud State University – Mary Ann Greenwald
- St. Cloud Technical College– Mary Ann Greenwald
- St. John's University & College of St. Benedict– Mary Ann Greenwald
- MN State Univ., Moorhead – Perry Madden
- Concordia College – Perry Madden
- Minnesota State CTC Fergus Falls – Perry Madden
- Minnesota State CTC Moorhead – Perry Madden
- Ridgewater College, Hutchinson – Susan Dueis
- Ridgewater College, Willmar– Susan Dueis
- Pine Technical College – Dan Honetschlager

Vendor Relations

- Maintenance Agreement: In August, we met with the top management of Ex Libris to discuss our maintenance agreement proposal. We have been awaiting their counter-proposal since that time, yet despite several reminders, we have received no response from Ex Libris. I have asked Greg Huwe from the Minnesota Office of the Attorney General, to write them concerning the need to have an agreement in place. Until a maintenance agreement is in place, we will not be paying the maintenance invoice.
- I have written Ex Libris a letter insisting that they live up to the terms of the contract regarding the pricing of an ad hoc reporting tool (\$300 per end user license) after we received an invoice for over \$100k for ARC2. I have not received a response. The PALS staff recommended and the Executive Committee agreed that we would not buy it at that price.

Aleph & Integrated ILL

- V18 update
 - Many of the most serious problems we have reported with version 18 should be fixed with the April service pack

- Ex Libris has announced the service packs will be issued only quarterly instead of monthly from now on
- Upgrade dates: Production server unavailable – May 29 (late in the day) - May 31
- “Go Live” on ver. 18 and ILL: June 1
- PALS will support Media Booking with ver. 18 and will be training users this summer

New products and services initiatives

Discovery Tools

When people talk about “the discovery tool” they are usually referring to the project AI Rykhus has been working on. It harvests Aleph data, using the open source tools SOLR and Lucene and gives users a more modern search interface which includes guided navigation features such as faceted searching. The presentation looks a little fresher too, with book covers displaying where available. We’re about ready to go from an Alpha release to the Beta release. There will be a demo of this at the Annual Meeting, but meanwhile, you can see it by going to <http://solr.mnpals.net/>.

Other means of creating a better user interface might include using OCLC WorldCat Local as the primary means of discovering library resources. It has a powerful search interface and features faceted searching, FRBRized displays and tiered grouping of search results; first presenting hits at the local library, then the consortium, then global resources. We have received consortium pricing from OCLC which is worth a discussion.

OpenURL Link Resolver

Open URL services help students find licensed full text even if the database they are currently searching does not have the article they want in full text. It links them to another source to get it, whether that’s another database or a publisher web site or even the print holdings of the library. It was hugely popular in my former library and I was surprised that many MnPALS libraries do not have a link resolver. Several of our members have OpenURL services using SFX through the U of M or have contracted with Serials Solutions, yet I thought it might be worth exploring if there are advantages to purchasing a product at the consortium level. In connection with the WorldCat Local quote, we have received a quote for WorldCat Link Manager, the OCLC OpenURL link resolver product. Other options exist as well, for instance we will look at consortium pricing from other vendors as well as explore the existing open source OpenURL link resolvers .

Integrated Library System

I think it is fair to say there is general discontentment with the Aleph product. The OPAC is seen as hard for students to use and understand. Libraries see that day to day work is more complicated and time-consuming than the previous system. For the PALS Office too, Aleph has shown itself as difficult to support, and maintaining the system is labor intensive for the technical staff. Also, we never really thought we got the system we paid for in terms of features, the ARC reporting module is only one example.

It's not much consolation, but users of library systems from other vendors feel much the same way. It is no wonder then that Open Source Integrated Library Systems (OS-ILS) such as Koha and Evergreen are making news and creating quite a buzz. Many of us have attended some presentations about Evergreen and Koha. These have been very stimulating, but limited to an hour or two, and in that time, one can only get a tantalizing glimpse of what these systems might offer. I thought that a more in-depth look at Koha and Evergreen might be useful in planning for the future. Are these systems really capable and complete enough to offer a consortium like ours a viable alternative to vendor software in the future? Perhaps but thing to note neither offers an integrated ILL module, so we would have to explore what our future ILL environment might be.

One possible vision for the future, which I call the "Lazarus Scenario", is for the PALS Office to reinvent itself as an Open Source support organization, like LibLime, and grow our user base back to resemble the PALS of pre-Aleph days. Just as Lazarus rises from the dead, so too might PALS be resurrected to become PALS 2.0 in this new Open Source environment.

Therefore, we have arranged a set of two-day training sessions here at the PALS Office with LibLime (Koha) and Equinox (Evergreen). Day one will be a technical seminar and include how to download, install, and configure the ILS and how to become a member of the OS ILS community of developers. Day two will be an in-depth review of the functional modules: OPAC, cataloging, acquisitions, etc. In the end, we should have working installations of both Koha and Evergreen here at the PALS office.

The User Council representatives or their alternates have been invited to attend the day-two functional module review via a web meeting, and the sessions will be recorded and put up on the PALS web site for anyone who wishes to view them.

Some R&D money, about \$65k, has been made available through the MnSCU IT to support some of these new projects. We have filed the project plans, and will need to file monthly progress reports to get the money into our R&D accounts.

Proxy Server upgrades

- The first install of EZ proxy for a new user (South Central CTC) is complete
- The first migration of an existing user from Libproxy to EZ Proxy is underway
- With EZ Proxy, user authentication can now be done using the campus computer or email logon (using LDAP) in addition to library barcode
- Once these tests instances are completed, we will announce the availability of EZ Proxy and take request for migration and new services via the PALS Support Center
- New request will be given a higher priority than moving existing proxy customers since it adds off-campus access to additional users
- Goal: All users migrated to EZ Proxy by Sept 30, 2008.

Budget update

The slow erosion of our surplus continues as foreseen. Financing new products and services in the fiscal environment we find ourselves in will be a challenge. So will replacing the knowledge and skill sets of PALS Staff retiring in the next few years. Todd Digby and I will continue to explore additional funding sources in the future.

We have sent out the final participant charges to the libraries; these are calculated on the 4% increase as outlined on the PALS Study Group Report.

In order to make the accounting easier to understand, I have created separate accounts for Operations, Capital, R&D and CRM (Right Now). Please see the descriptions below.

Accounts created and funds distributed

- PALS Operations
 - Revenue - Member fees and other general revenues
 - Expenses - One-time or annual fees and expenses, office overhead, travel, salaries

- PALS Capital
 - Revenue - \$150k per year from Operations account
 - Expenses – Major Hardware, Software & multi-year expenses

- PALS R&D
 - Revenue – MnSCU IT project monies
 - Expenses – hardware for feasibility testing and assessment, staff salaries & training related to R&D

- Customer Relationship Management (Right Now) Support – Now a separate budget
 - Revenue – MnSCU Office of the Chancellor
 - Expenses – Salaries, travel, training, overhead

Budget Documents

- FY07 Final [Document]
- FY04-08 Summary [Document]
- FY 08 through 2nd Quarter [Document]

Conclusion

I would like to thank everyone for the warm welcome I have received. It's been my pleasure to serve in the role of Executive Director and I am confident that together we can chart an exciting future for the MnPALS Consortium and help our students and staffs (and ourselves!) achieve academic, career and life success.