

Ex Libris Staff (1980-2005) Questionnaire – Oren Beit-Arie

1. When did you start working for Ex Libris? How did this come about?

1988. I joined Aleph-Yissum as a programmer/developer. Honestly: I looked for a summer job after graduating at the Hebrew Uni in CS and Math. Never imagined that I'd stay for so long...

2. What was your job title, or, more generally, what did you do? Were there particular projects you were involved in?

Thinking of the 1980-2005 time period...

Programmer. I was hired to help Yohanan develop Aleph. My first project was to improve Aleph's sorting algorithm as Yohanan was not happy with the performance of COBOL/ISAM SORT routines... In my first year I also worked on projects such as multi-language (English-Hebrew-Arabic) catalog-card printing (!). In 1989 I moved to Copenhagen for 1 year to work on-site at the Danish Technical University library who (together with CERN) was our first major account in EU, and a developer partner for Aleph300. I worked on-site with the library on developing that "new gen" system. The hallmark of Aleph300 was GUI screens (block mode). In essence, we worked on improving workflows and graphic design, using VT100 like terminals...

3. Why was Ex Libris as successful as it was? Why did customers go with Aleph rather than other systems? Some possibilities:

- a. Superior system and program design? (-- primarily Yohanan's doing? Others?)
- b. Superior functional design? (-- primarily Judy Levi's doing? Others?)
- c. Superior strategy (Oren Beit-Arie -- and others?)
- d. Superior marketing (Barbara Radel, et al.)
- e. Superior organization (Azriel and Udi and ???)
- f. Other?

Probably a combination of it all. I should say though that while clever functionality (and design) was definitely a factor, we were successful *despite* our lack in complete functionality. All the early adopters selected us based on the potential and the trust they had in us to do what we said we would.

The major breakthrough – getting our first customers (eg DTV and Cern for Aleph 300, Gent for Aleph500, ND in the US) was based on: Architecture, Vision, culture of innovation + passion and enthusiasm, trust - believing in us (which was a huge risk of course on their end). I do think that above all, Yohanan's personality and super-

cleverness contributed hugely to the trust and the realization that with Aleph (at the time), they will be able to achieve

4. Who were Ex Libris' main competitors?

Depending on when and where, and which product.

In traditional ILS:

In Europe there were a number of competitors, including Dabis (whom we acquired in 1997). Also: Dobis/Libis (IBM based system developed by the Catholic University of Lueven..!), Dynix

In NA: NOTIS, Endeavor/Voyager, Dynix, Horizon, etc

In Link Resolvers:

We were the first and only. Then came 1-cate and then Ser-Sol's resolver and then Endeavor's.

In Metasearch: Muse Global, WebFeat, Endeavor's

5. I think that two decisions – perhaps just coincidence or luck – were very important:

- a. the use of the MARC standard – absolutely critical to success in North America (and the UK?), perhaps less so in Europe?
- b. the early use of Unicode, the ability to handle multiple languages and scripts – Hebrew and English from the first and, very early, Danish/German/Italian – laying the groundwork for making Aleph a system which could be implemented in virtually *any* language
- c. Others?

Re MARC: the thing is, we claimed we had MARC... We thought that the flexible FIELD/Sub-Field/Value model should accommodate any schema, including MARC... Of course, we were only 50% correct. Our work with NA libraries (particularly ND and McGill – for Authority control) drove us to +100% compliance... In EU, UNIMARC was of course also important

Other major factors:

- Inherent Consortia support
- The decision to rebuild Aleph500 with new architecture, based on Oracle and Unix (instead of just adding interface – which was the plan for Aleph400 that was shelved)
- Flexibility and aleph500 multi-tier architecture (including opness through the X-server) was a major reason for being selected by insitutions like Gent, KOBV, ACC, Harvard, and to a large extent also ND, IOWA and McGill.

6. Comments on the role of user groups (ICAU, NAAUG, SMUG, etc.)?

HUGE. They kept us honest, help us set priorities and most importantly demonstrated the kind of partnership we build with our customers. It always amazes and humbles me to realize how much time, effort and passion was put into these organizations – all volunteer based – and how absolutely critical they were to EXL success. These UGs are also our best ambassadors and champions.

7. Were there particularly interesting/valuable customers that you remember?

DTV/DTU (Mogens Sandfaer) – brought us to become a valid EU-level player with their Aleph-300 dev partnership

Gent (Herbert Van de Sompel) – selected Aleph500, against all odds as an early adopter/dev partner, and of course also agreed to sell SFX to us, and worked with me on developing the OpenURL standard. He was also key to our acquisition of bX from LANL in ~2007

ND – first customer; Jenifer Younger, Doug McCuean (sp?), Laura Sills, etc.

Larry Woods / Iowa: formed SMUG (the UG for SFX and Metalib)

Jiri Kende: Chairman of IGELU from the mid 2000s til about a year ago...

Alma Dev partners and particularly: BC/Bob Gerrity, Purdue/Jim Mullins – who trusted us with the Alma Vision.

Also: Lueven/Jo Rademakers

Others:

8. Were there modules which you felt were particularly good, distinguishing Aleph from other vendors' versions of the same module?

Multi-lingual (i18n), consortia support, flexibility/configuration of almost everything (and too much...), openness.

Re Openness – I think we did not receive credit for very innovative and bold approach we took early on: starting with multi-tier, services- based architecture (with the introduction of Aleph500 in 96'-97', then with the introduction of X-Server, the SFX-API (2000), then Open Platform (2008) and now with the Developers Platform and our extensive open interfaces.

9. It seems that, with ALEPH 500, the choice of a Linux / Oracle environment was important -- but maybe most of the competitors' products also operated in this environment?

Yes. However, we introduced Multi-tier architecture – with unique component such as an I/O layer and application services, which was quite unique

10. Are there particular interesting, fun, or odd things that you remember?

Oh yes...

11. When and why did you leave?

Not yet...