

Waubonsee Community College

Case Study

Waubonsee Community College's Todd Library expands its interactions with on- and off-campus users through Web Services and the SirsiDynix Symphony® API.

"We're very supportive of staying at the forefront of information and pushing the boundaries... it's utilizing these services that makes the library the place to go when [students] need to know something."

—John Wohlers

Waubonsee Community College
library technology coordinator

One of the most active SirsiDynix user developers, John Wohlers of Waubonsee Community College has done quite a bit with Waubonsee's Todd Library system over his 15 years there. Wohlers, the library technology coordinator, has come up with dozens of ideas for improving, customizing and streamlining library services – many of which he's already implemented in his short few years with the library's SirsiDynix Symphony ILS.

"We have so many ideas, and so many great ideas that I really want to get around to doing, but time is a limited resource!" Wohlers said. "Day-to-day operations often take precedent over the 'ooh, let's play with this' projects."

Wohlers, of course, is greatly downplaying the significant amounts of customization he and his team have accomplished for the Waubonsee Community College library – ranging from automated social media outreach to website modifications. Even so, he will tell you that he's had to prioritize, with many and disparate requests coming his way on a daily basis. For managing those requests on a time crunch, he turns to SirsiDynix Web Services.

"As a general whole, Web Services saves me time," Wohlers said.

Countless uses for system information

Waubonsee switched to SirsiDynix in June of 2004, and within a year of the go-live date Wohlers was diving into the SirsiDynix Symphony® API. Armed with the tools and training, he quickly got to work creating unique reports and some impressive extensions – most recently a complete integration of the library's Drupal-based public website with the Symphony ILS.

"Staff and users have been thrilled," Wohlers said. "Once they log in, all the information is seamless and it becomes a part of the website wherever they go."

As part of this streamlining, Wohlers has created a page with all the circulation rules, and has embedded in it a box that lists replacement costs, borrowing privileges, and "current amount owed" for any fines or fees, so users or staff can immediately see all the information they need in one place.

In 2008, SirsiDynix Web Services was released and Wohlers, having found significant success with the API, immediately latched onto that as well.

"We upgraded to the most recent version of Symphony required to use Web Services," Wohlers said. That was all it took.

Since then, building upon their existing API use and custom reports, the Todd Library's customization and patron outreach has expanded significantly to include automatic updates on new arrivals and other useful notifications, which are auto-fed to digital signage throughout the building and the library's Twitter feed.

"I've taken some of the new material data from our system and now that shows up [on the digital signage]. The data and messages rotate, and it brings attention to brand new materials available," Wohlers said. "We get students coming up saying, 'Ooh, I just saw that you have such and such – where do I find that?'"



Similarly, on Twitter, Waubonsee has created a report that Tweets any new materials that have been borrowed in the last hour, as well as facts and other items that draw attention to library services. Pulling from Web Services-enabled reports, the Twitter stream is updated with messages like “Can’t make it to the library to do research? 101 people used our e-books and databases off campus yesterday.” Each Tweet links users back to the library website, reminding them of resources that are available from wherever the student or faculty member may be.

“We’ve had comments through Twitter from students getting excited [about a new item update] and wanting to put a hold on it,” Wohlers said. “Someday soon I’ll add that ability as well.”

SirsiDynix Symphony® API vs. Web Services

Waubonsee has gotten something of a double hitter with Web Services and the Symphony API combined. Web Services gives them quick adapting capabilities and Web access, while the API is a deeper dive into the system. As Wohlers explains it, “Web Services is more for real-time access, so you don’t have to do a lot of finagling to make it happen. It just happens.”

That time savings has come in handy on numerous occasions, and has supplemented the heavier lifting of batch processing and reports that he does with the API. It’s like comparing two children – Wohlers said it’s nearly impossible to pick a favorite or a “which is better,” comparing them side-by-side. It’s all about what you want to do with it.

“The API required a lot of training, but it is meaty and a better choice in many cases for big reports,” Wohlers said. “For information that you want to be interactive or need real-time access to, there’s hands-down no choice. Web Services is far, far superior for that. It is just right there, by its nature, ready to go.”

Furthermore, Wohlers insists that anyone who is familiar with Web Services in general will have no problem at all using it.

“Once I got it, it was very much a no-brainer,” he said. “I was able to throw together the first piece I did for Drupal [for the public website] in about two hours. It was very easy, rapid development.”

Reaping the benefits

As the library grows, so do its technical offerings – much of which Waubonsee attributes to its API- and Web Services-enabled modifications.

“Our library services manager is very happy with this, as is the dean of our library. They’re very supportive of staying at the forefront of information and pushing the boundaries so we can show students this is not just a place of dusty books and librarians with horn-rimmed glasses telling you to shush,” Wohlers said. “It’s far more than that, and it’s utilizing these services that makes the library the place to go when they need to know something.”

With Web Services, the library has found even another way to better reach its community – allowing programming students to use library system data for classes.

“Anytime you get students touching the library and working with it is a win in my book,” Wohlers said. “Whether they’re coming through the doors or just touching the data, it lets them know we are here and that there is modern stuff going on around them.”

THE BOOKMYNE™ IPHONE APP, AVAILABLE FREE WITH WEB SERVICES.

With Waubonsee Community College’s installation of the basic SirsiDynix Web Services, the library and its users gained free access to another perk: the SirsiDynix BookMyne™ iPhone application.

“Our faculty, students and some staff have been really excited with BookMyne, seeing the materials that are useful to them right from their phone,” Wohlers said. “It gives them access to the library, and they don’t have to pay to get it. That’s very important to us.”

The Waubonsee library has had BookMyne live since the day after it was released, and has been happy with the simplicity, user-friendliness and added capabilities it provides.

“The process of setting it up was very simple to do – I had the thing up and running in two hours and fifteen minutes. That was sight unseen, having never played with it before,” Wohlers said. “I was thoroughly amazed.”

The new BookMyne 2.0 features have been even more of a crowd pleaser, he added. “I love the camera function where you can be in a bookstore and snap a picture of the barcode [then find it at your library],” Wohlers said. “That has been a longtime dream of mine. Now it’s a reality, in your hand, immediately.”

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