

OhioLINK libraries “go live” with state-of-the-art system software

On-time and on-budget upgrade of shared system is a milestone achievement for Ohio’s college and university libraries

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OhioLINK libraries have reached an extraordinary milestone with the successful upgrade of shared system software to support teaching, learning, and research for Ohio higher education. The on-time and on-budget project was the culmination of more than two years of planning and collaboration, encompassing the migration of more than a million titles.

The entire OhioLINK consortium, composed of 115 libraries at 86 four-year and two-year institutions of higher education across Ohio, is now fully operational on the state-of-the-art Ex Libris Alma/Primo VE system.

“This significant investment in Ohio’s digital infrastructure ensures that students and faculty at all OhioLINK member institutions benefit from faster, smarter, and more integrated access to scholarly materials,” said Mike Duffey, chancellor of the Ohio Department of Higher Education, which funded the project and oversees OhioLINK as part of the Ohio Technology Consortium. “This modern, scalable platform will connect seamlessly with the learning environment to lower student costs, enhance academic outcomes, and support ongoing innovation in teaching and research.”

Enhanced Features for Library Users

The cloud-based enterprise software suite for OhioLINK libraries also includes five interoperable apps that work together to meet the educational and research needs of students and faculty. The new system’s user-friendly features include:

- Unified search capabilities: A single search box to find relevant media, print, and electronic resources, including immediate access to licensed e-journals and e-books.
- Resource-sharing improvements: Real-time tracking of user requests, facilitating fast and easy access to the OhioLINK consortium’s shared print catalog.
- Modern discovery tools: An intuitive user interface supported by AI-assisted research recommendations, citation trails, and citation management software exports.
- Integration with Learning Management Systems: Expected in 2026, the ability to link required course readings to library collections, thereby reducing student costs.
- Mobile app: Also in 2026, responsive smartphone technology that will enable full utilization of the library’s system.

In addition, the system streamlines daily operations for library staff and enhances consortial reporting for data analysis and decision-making—essential for OhioLINK’s shared resource negotiations and its statewide collection development and acquisitions team.

Unprecedented Collaboration

Building on 30 years of technological accomplishments, OhioLINK led the migration project in collaboration with Ex Libris. Hundreds of staff from member libraries contributed their time and expertise as part of advisory and functional teams, while also maintaining high levels of library service throughout the migration process.

Over the last 18 months, OhioLINK managed 626 migration-related online meetings that were attended by more than 20,000 member-library staff. Additionally, 243 migration-related videos were shared via OhioLINK’s member-only site and viewed for 3,457 hours.

Collective Achievement for Statewide Benefit

Amy Pawlowski, OhioLINK’s executive director, noted the effectiveness of Ex Libris’ project management and acknowledged the contributions from member libraries. “Keeping such a complex project on time and on budget really was a remarkable collective achievement,” Pawlowski said. “Librarians are service-minded collaborators, knowing their contributions would benefit not just their own library’s students and faculty but also their OhioLINK library colleagues across the state, and ultimately the more than 800,000 Ohio higher education faculty and students who use the system. We can’t thank them enough.”

Liz Kiscaden, dean and university librarian of the University of Cincinnati Libraries and chair of OhioLINK’s Library Advisory Council, emphasized the benefits of the shared approach for member institutions. “We are thankful that the Ohio Department of Higher Education recognized the efficiency of a unified, statewide approach, and OhioLINK was able to negotiate favorable terms for the technology,” Kiscaden said. “The ability to share information, strategies, and best practices across the state benefits us all. The University of Cincinnati Libraries is extremely pleased to be able to offer this state-of-the-art system to our staff, faculty, researchers, and students.”

Structured for Success

Standing teams of more than 100 functional experts fielded large volumes of information, meeting regularly and actively participating in an online project management “basecamp.” Implementation was led locally by a designated “Project Lead” at each library.

Marty Jenkins, head of content acquisition and management for Wright State University Libraries and co-chair of the OhioLINK migration Acquisitions Working Group, found collaborating with librarians statewide inspiring. “These newly formed functional working groups offered a ‘hive mind’ approach to guidance on policies and creating workflows, helping us to prioritize the skills and activities needed to tackle such a big change in our libraries’ work processes,” Jenkins said.

Some of the collaborative teams created for the Ex Libris Alma/Primo migration will continue to offer advice and functional problem-solving for the consortium into 2026 as OhioLINK libraries move toward “steady state.”

Effective Stakeholder Communication

OhioLINK maintained regular communications across the consortium, supplemented with a robust “on demand” project extranet, and functional-expertise-focused online presentations/ discussions that were open to interested library staff.

Understanding that the Ex Libris software’s interoperability with non-library campus systems would require local IT support, OhioLINK also held quarterly CIO briefings to ensure campus IT would be able to plan for student information, user authentication, and security needs.

John Ellinger, chair of the Inter-University Council of Ohio Chief Information Officers group, said, “The CIO

briefings have been extremely helpful for our IT teams to prepare for and anticipate changes. OhioLINK’s IT-focused updates allowed us to understand the software’s rollout progress and what was needed at our individual institutions.”

Looking Ahead

OhioLINK is preparing to help members launch more Ex Libris apps, including Leganto, which links library collections with campus learning systems to lower student textbook costs, and a mobile app for full library access via smartphones.

“We are really happy to have a more secure environment that further facilitates collaboration and efficiencies across the consortium,” Pawlowski said. “OhioLINK was established more than 30 years ago to improve library services through technology, and this system will give us new approaches to getting even better.”

About OhioLINK

OhioLINK, Ohio’s academic library consortium, was established in 1992 to improve the return on investment in higher education by lowering costs, increasing efficiencies, and providing the widest access to a core collection of high-quality scholarly materials across Ohio’s 4-year and 2-year institutions. OhioLINK pools funding to leverage negotiations for affordable and stable library resources, manages expert team collaborations, and provides technological expertise for electronic management and access to shared resources. OhioLINK is a member of the Ohio Technology Consortium, which is part of the Ohio Department of Higher Education.

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