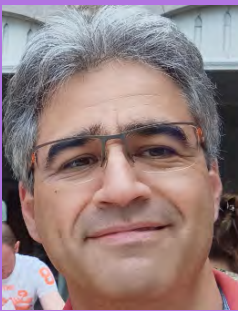# Reflecting on the Next Discovery Experience - An Interview

As Ex Libris engages stakeholders to
imagine the future of discovery,
we asked one long-time user to take
a brief look back, and a long look ahead.

A librarian at the University of Liège in Belgium for more than 20 years, **François Renaville** has been in charge of the library system for nearly 15 of those years, working with multiple Ex Libris products.
He also gives his time back to the library community by helping to coordinate the IGeLU Conference; he currently serves as the lead organizer and sits on the IGeLU Steering Committee.

How long have you and the Liège library been involved with Ex Libris?

We went live with Aleph in 2006, so 17 years. When I started, everything was local — local Aleph, local SFX. Our first Primo in 2013 was local. When we moved to Alma, we moved to SaaS Primo on the Cloud, and then we moved from the classic UI to Primo VE in 2019. So this is my third Primo, and I'm looking forward the next Primo and the Next Discovery Experience.

That's a lot of technology change. You mentioned the Next Discovery Experience, how have student and library users' expectations changed over the same timeframe?

I worked for the first time with a computer in the '90s when everything was very local and structured in the hierarchy of Windows. Habits have changed, especially in young people. They communicate via texts and do homework on their mobiles, and they have different ways of dealing with products, solutions, and software. When we moved to Primo in 2013, at the very beginning there was high use of advanced search. As I recall, one-third of the searches were made with the advanced search and only two-thirds with the simple, Google-like search. Now we're at about 11 to 13 percent advanced search. Use of parentheses and Boolean operators should be limited in Primo — they're in conflict with the algorithm. When we look at the search logs, not only in Primo but also on the website, we see questions, we see natural language queries. That's the way it works now.

> "With all the change we have seen … you can't wait too long to adapt. Every five years, at least, you have to put everything on the table and rethink, from scratch."

Speaking of that, there were some announcements made at IGeLU 2023 regarding the next iteration of Primo. What are your first impressions?

The presentation on the Next Discovery Experience was really exciting and I'm looking forward to seeing more. I was told that Ex Libris plans to review the Primo system and discovery interface every five years, and I think that's great. With all the change we have seen, it's hard to imagine what's going to be a good search experience for the generations to come. You can't wait too long to adapt. Every five years, at least, you have to put everything on the table and rethink, from scratch.

Analytics is another element that was shared at IGeLU as part of the Next Discovery Experience. How does that fit in?

Again, I'm curious to know more. From what I saw at IGeLU, I think it could be a great opportunity to get more detailed and concentrated data from more interfaces. I'm not saying it's easy to find the time or the people to analyze the data, but if we notice that a specific page or feature is not used, what would be the reason? Is it because it's not interesting? Is it because it's poorly presented? It's a bit hidden on the website? There might be many, many reasons.

Interesting you would bring that up. The analytics vision for Primo is to investigate the user journey and guide how that looks in the future.

Well, we don't know what the future will be made of. But the more connections you have, the better it is. We know what the future would probably look like with linked data and semantic web. Having those connections between the record, the metadata, and anything related to the record, that's the way it should work. As I remember in the Next Discovery Experience presentation, there's an author card?

Yes, it's about the author and contributions to the field, and it establishes connections not only about the works that person wrote, but of others who wrote about that person.

It's a nice feature. We've actually been working on something like that from our end. I'm also looking forward to seeing the exhibitions feature. We have a rich collection of heritage materials, and many have been digitized and made available on the DSpace platform. They are discoverable in Primo, but we would like to promote them in a way that's not possible now with collection discovery and provide a real virtual exhibition experience.

> "… the more connections you have, the better it is … Having those connections between the record, the metadata, and anything related to the record, that's the way it should work."

We want to tell stories that create connections between different physical or digital objects in our collection, and explain those relationships to students. We're starting with the historical aspects, but you can also consider sociological aspects related to Liège, the influence of the university on the region, or on big companies that in turn impacted the history of the country. It's a bit like what you can do with LibGuides. The virtual exhibition feature could do something similar, but deliver a more pleasurable and interactive experience, like real discovery.

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About the Next Discovery Experience

Based on real library and end-user needs and requirements drawn from feedback from our deeply engaged community,
Ex Libris is on a journey to incorporate the best-fit technologies and advancements to meet the needs of current and future end-users.

The New Primo UX
will guide end-users effortlessly through the search and delivery process, with smart recommendations and expanded exploration tools to uncover relevant resources they might have otherwise missed.

Advanced Analytics
of user engagement will allow libraries to better understand the user journey and how best to interact with end-users to increase interaction and use of library resources.

Linked Open Data
will offer connectivity across all library resources, internal or external, and regardless of their origin or format, linked together in a metadata network that will allow users to deep-dive into a topic or uncover and explore previously unrecognized relationships.

Artificial Intelligence
responsibly and effectively applied, will draw from trusted scholarly content to support conversational discovery, summarize articles, and otherwise solve challenges faced by real users.

What you're describing is a richer and deeper level of engagement with the library.

Well, patrons go to the library website to get information, and we try to provide a lot of services together under the University of Liège Library. "Library as a Service" is something we try to promote. We're not only a space with collections, seats and places to work, but also a collection of services that include space and seat booking, registration for events and training classes, ILL services, resource sharing, search on demand, purchase requests, help in open-access understanding, and publishing help for young researchers or Ph.D. students. The catalog is one of the services we provide, but we provide others with Drupal which is hosted locally here on our server and LibCal which is on Springshare's cloud. We have the same layout and look across all three different products because the users don't care about the solution they're using; they're visiting the University of Liège Library. It's not important for them to have clear distinctions that this is a catalog, this is LibCal, and these are other services. The users have the impression it's one portal. Similarly, we don't think they need know there is a difference between local resources that are in Alma harvested by our team, and those that are remote in the Central Discovery Index because they have no idea what CDI is.

So the focus isn't on the underlying technology, it's on creating more relevant and interesting connections. The point is to make the lives of our users more enriched, giving them directionality so they can choose which way they want to go in their research.

Yes, there are a lot of things being developed, a lot of things happening. **I'm looking forward to it.**

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About the Library

The University of Liège (ULiège) in Belgium, founded in 1817, is a distinguished public research institution known for its academic excellence, ongoing support for open science and contributions to various scientific fields. With multiple campuses, including the main Sart Tilman campus, the university offers a broad spectrum of undergraduate and postgraduate programs in sciences, engineering, humanities, and more. ULiège is recognized for its global research impact, fostering international collaborations, and producing notable alumni across academia, science, politics, and business. The university's commitment to research-based education, vibrant campus life, and international orientation contributes to its position as a leading institution in the Belgian and global academic landscape.

About Ex Libris, Part of Clarivate

Ex Libris, part of Clarivate, is a leading global provider of cloud-based solutions that enable institutions and their users to create, manage, and share knowledge. In close collaboration with its customers and the broader community, Ex Libris develops solutions that increase library productivity, maximize the impact of research activities, enhance teaching and learning, and drive student mobile engagement. Ex Libris serves over 7,500 customers in 90 countries. For more information, see our website and join us on LinkedIn, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter.

Our team of experts looks forward to hearing from you

Contact us