Why It's Important to Invest in MARC Record/Collection Database Management

Libraries Add Specific, Measurable Value

An up-to-date, well stocked school library, staffed with library professionals, helps that school do better in reading and writing test performance. A study by the Illinois School Library Media Association on the effect of libraries on student test scores shows that higher library staffing levels are linked to higher reading performance for elementary, middle and high schools (increases of almost 13%, over 8% and more than 7%, respectively.)[1] And when librarians spend more time helping students and teachers, there is a positive impact on the ACT scores for that school as well.

That same report also finds that the size of a school's book collection also impacts their overall reading and writing test scores. Schools with larger collections increase their scores between 4% (for 11th grade students) to almost 14% for 8th grade students.

But, in order for librarians to do all of these things, maintain a high quality collection with up-to-date materials *and* be available to teachers and students for research, curriculum preparation and literacy education, something has to give.

So what's one easy way you can make your library more effective?

In a word - metadata.

Mitinet's database management tools, not only free up the librarian's time, they make a collection more accessible.

➡ **Complete and accurate metadata improves search results, especially for younger users.**

➡ **Enhancing Subject Headings to include up-to-date and Kid-Friendly™ terminology makes items easier to find, easing user frustration and encouraging information literacy.**

➡ **Adding Reading Program information to existing MARC records incorporates more items *already in the collection* into many reading programs, making them more effective, saving time on the part of teachers and students and getting more use out of a value asset.**

➡ **Converting to RDA creates metadata intended for use in today's digital world, by improving material classification information and eliminating unnecessary abbreviations.**

Search Results Depend Entirely on Quality Metadata

Forget the image you might have of students leisurely browsing the shelves for books to use. Today students go straight to the computer and type in their search criteria. They *might* go past the first screen of results to find just the right book, but more likely they jot down the first few search results and that's it. If they get nothing back, their next stop is the librarian's desk.

The library catalog, or MARC record database, is the key tool in library management. It tracks and organizes the collection and allows access for library users through quality metadata. But what happens if that catalog isn't as complete as you think it is?

Metadata - as it applies to libraries, is information about books and materials in the form of a MARC record.

The metadata record for a specific item in the library collection is the MARC record. If the metadata in your database is good, it's easier for users to find the materials they need. If the metadata is incomplete or inaccurate, those items are very likely to sit on the shelf.

And if the book is an e-book, bad metadata makes it impossible to find.

This ability to find a book through it's metadata is called "**discoverability**". The more information in the MARC record, the better the item's discoverability.

Individual pieces of information in the MARC record are stored in fields, and each field is a possible **"access point"** or opportunity for someone to find that item with a digital search. The more access points a MARC record has, the more likely it is to show up in a search result.

This is especially critical for young users, who are much more impatient online search users. These are the kids who give up if their search is ineffective or they get poor results, making using the library more frustrating.

What kind of impact can this have on your library? Sure it might be a little harder to find books, but you've got a trained librarian whose job it is to put that data in the database, and to help kids find what they need. You've also got a library automation service that organizes the material and makes it easy to find.

So why pay extra for something you already have? The easy answer?

You already *are* paying extra, in added processing time and an underused asset - your library collection.

A good MARC record Includes

Identifying information such as...

— The book's title, author and ISBN

— When it was published and who published it

— Physical qualities of the item, such as size and number of pages for books, and run-time for movies

Categorization information such as...

— What the book is about (subject heading)

— What's in it (the summary and table of contents)

— Who might be interested or able to read it (reading program information, awards or reviews, genre categories)

Library Specific information (holdings) such as...

— Where the book is (which site and in what collection)

— How many copies are in the collection

Not all MARC records are created equal.

MARCs come from many sources, and some of them contain very little of the information needed by your library to be useful. When that happens, the librarian must add information to the MARC before the item can be used.

Quality Metadata Can Be Expensive

Creating and maintaining quality MARC records takes time. Keeping them up-to-date with new subject headings, reading program and award information helps their discoverability but requires that someone stay on top of that information and update the database on a regular basis.

Today many publishers and distributors supply MARC records with their products, but the quality of the record can vary widely. Some may have only the basic information (Title, Author, Publisher, ISBN) while others may be more complete, but will still require the holdings information to be added. For many libraries this is still a largely manual process. And even if you have dedicated staff to process new materials, items can often sit for days or weeks, waiting for the processing that allows them to be added to the shelves and used by your students.

The Average Cost of Processing

According to the American Library Association, the average annual budget for books in a school library is $5000[1]. The *2012 Texas Public Libraries ROI Report*[2] found the average price for a children's book to be $26.71. Using these numbers...

The average school library buys roughly 185 new books a year.

If a librarian spends even half an hour per book cataloging or enhancing the MARC records for new items...

She spends an average of least 92 hours a school year on processing.

And chances are that calculation is low, since it doesn't include checking imported records for accuracy, fixing old database errors, or updating existing records with new information such as awards or updated reading program information.

Processing delays cost too.

When new books sit on the processing shelf, waiting for their turn, that's time they could be on the shelves, being used by teachers and students.

In addition, many library automation systems charge extra for adding metadata like reading programs to your database. You may think you've already got what you need, when in fact, you're being charged extra, sometimes a lot extra, for anything more than the basics.

Mitinet helps you update & enhance your database for less than it costs to do it yourself.

Mitinet Library Services provides effective, efficient library management services, including catalog-wide updating, maintenance and enhancements that don't require a significant time investment on the part of the librarian.

For libraries that use our **Full Circle Support** service, the entire process of database updating and maintenance is done by us, at the time selected by the librarian. We take the database, update it and put it back in the automation system. All the librarian needs to do is tell us she's ready to start and read the report when we're done.

Mitinet can't eliminate all the time a librarian spends on database management, but we can help ensure that the time she does spend on it is more effective.

We're talking about maintaining a complete and effective MARC record database with less time spent on processing and database management and more time available for your students and staff.

How much time could you add to your librarian's day with Mitinet services?

Quality Metadata Gives you Better Value for Your Collection

Getting more out of materials already purchased is better than having to throw away unused books and buy more.
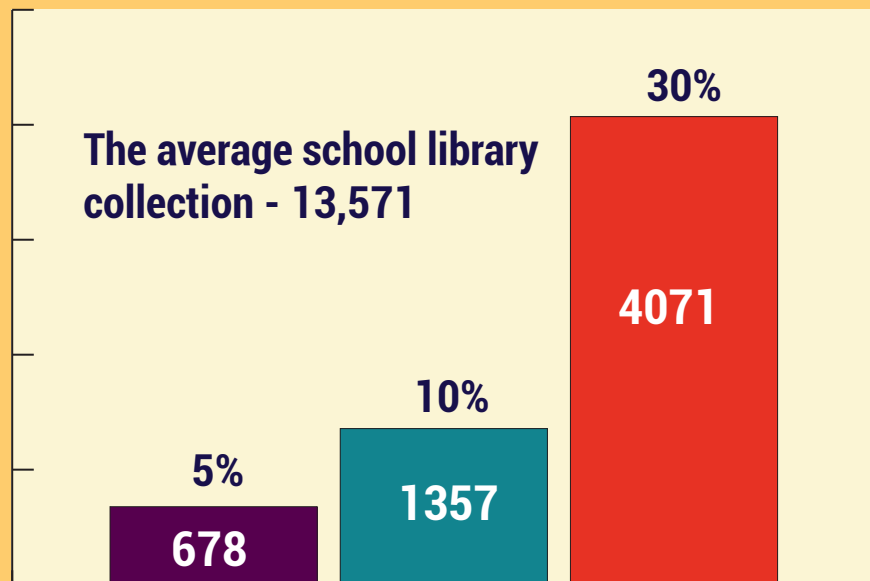
Our experience shows us that a library that has never had their database cleaned or enhanced can have between 5 and 30% of their collection identified with incomplete or inaccurate MARC records.

What does that mean?

According to the American Library Association 2012 State of American Libraries Report, the average school library collection was 13,571 items.

If even 5% of those items has a brief or inaccurate MARC record, that's 678 items less likely to circulate.

Which means you're unlikely to get the full value out of a segment of books that

The average school library collection - 13,571

30%
4071

10%
1357

5%
678

cost, on average, $18,109. (678 x $26.71 average children's book price.) If you haven't ever had your database cleaned and updated, the average cost of under-utilized materials could be much, much more.

There are many reasons why a book doesn't circulate, but having a bad MARC record shouldn't be one of them.

My school district consists of 27 schools & has been using Mitinet's Full Circle Support for two years. Media coordinators find their services extremely valuable for saving time & money. Twice each year, Mitinet updates Accelerated Reader® information, Lexile® levels, & subject headings for our district catalog in a timely manner.

Last year, several schools asked Mitinet to standardize call numbers in all of their copy records. This was completed for the 2 schools in less than 2 days! I am extremely happy with Mitinet's customer service & library services rendered for my school district.

Angela Bradshaw, District Media Coordinator, Burke County Public Schools - Morganton, NC

The Importance of Accurate and Complete Subject Headings

Complete subject headings bridge the gap between helping students find materials and helping them become better information searchers. Making sure that all applicable subject headings are in the MARC record is the first step to assuring better search results.

But subject headings are also what's called **authorized terminology**, meaning that a body authorized to create standardized headings (such as the Library of Congress), determines the appropriate subject heading for an item. This creates consistency when organizing a collection, but can also introduce difficulties when the user is a student.

Digital searches are especially hard for young students, who are still learning vocabulary and may also have trouble spelling the names of the things they want to search. Authorized terminology is often set at a higher reading level than the book it describes. A 1995 study on children's search behavior found that 30% of 8th grade books had subject headings using vocabulary above the reading level of the item they described but just under 68% of 6th grade had subject headings more difficult than the reading level of the book itself.[1]

What Are Enhanced Subject Headings?

Subject headings are updated all the time, with new ones added and others made obsolete, as terms fall out of favor or if they become politically incorrect. A collection that doesn't get routine subject heading maintenance can, over time, become less effective as the outdated authorized terminology no longer reflects general usage.

Mitinet considers a robust MARC record one that has at least three subject headings, and our standard is six. Our **Subject Heading Update** service, available as part of **Full Circle Support™,** or as a data service option, not only adds new subject headings, it also removes obsolete headings and updates politically incorrect ones, if requested.

A Sample of Kid-Friendly™ Terms

Original   >>>>>> Kid-Friendly

Aeronautics >>>> Airplanes

Arachnids >>>>>> Spiders, Bugs

Automobiles >>>> Cars

Careers   >>>>>>> Jobs

Earth Science   >>> Geology

Minerals >>>>>> Rocks

Nutrition >>>>>> Food

Kids search differently than adults.

In answer to young library users' special needs, we've created an exclusive service we call **Kid-Friendly™** terminology. Kid-Friendly™ terminology adds dozens of subject headings, words that kids use to search, making sucessful searches much more likely.

Improved search results reduce frustration and help kids build their skills faster.

Lots of librarians can tell you Mitinet does what they say they do - make Lexile® numbers go into the MARC records seamlessly.

Since I don't have access to my own MARC records, I can't speak to that. But I can tell you that Mitinet is flexible and understanding of client's needs even when it doesn't align to what they normally do.

Really, the best decision I've made as a new teacher librarian was talking to Justin at AASL!

Christine Sturgeon, Teacher Librarian/Technology Integrationist, Manson Northwest Webster Community Schools

Adding Reading Program Data Adds Value to Your Collection

Because reading proficiency plays such an important role in student success, using assessments and measurements to consistently determine a reader's ability are a necessity. Early assessment and intervention help schools provide the support needed, at the time it's needed, to help children succeed academically through college and into their careers.[1] Whether it's Lexiles®, AR®, SRC®, Fountas & Pinnell® or some other program, part of the process must include identifying those books that students can read and which challenge their reading skills.

There are two issues at work here. First, there is the issue of assuring that items that do have a score or assigned level have that information in the MARC record. The second issue is widening the number of items that could be included in a Lexile® based program with a correlation.

Assuring Books Have the Reading Program Information They Need

While many items have reading scores assigned to them, depending on the publisher and the type of reading assessment program used, that information is not always reflected in the MARC record. Maybe because it was purchased before it got a score, or maybe the MARC was cataloged without that information available. Sometimes the scores are there, but inaccurate because they've changed since purchase.

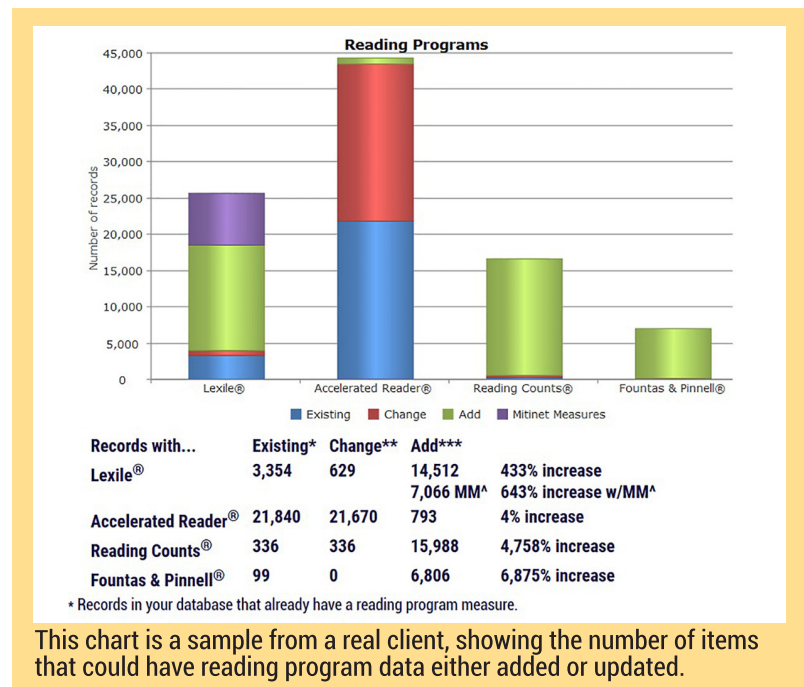**Adding this missing information to MARC records is another way to add value to your existing collection**. For students and teachers who look for items that fall within a certain reading range, books that could qualify but don't have the right information aren't going to circulate. Add the information and you immediately expand the number of items available for your students, and make them easier to find.

Expanding Lexile® Scores with a Reading Level Correlation

The Lexile® Measure, by Metametrics®, is used at the school level in all 50 states. It's used to support state tests and is integrated with many standards. As of January, 2016, there are over 232,000 titles with Lexile® measures available, with over 117,000 of those in the K-12 reading level range.

Mitinet created **Mitinet Measures**™ when it became apparent that many schools either lacked the library materials to support their Lexile® initiatives or their materials were missing the metadata needed to use them as part of their reading program. Often, the lack of inventory and matching metadata combined to make using the Lexile® system impractical, if not impossible.

Mitinet Measures™ is a solution for books that don't have a certified Lexile® measure. While no correlation is perfect, Mitinet Measures™ usually comes within 50 points (+ or -) of the potential Lexile® level. The combination of Lexile® measures and Mitinet Measures™ can almost double the hit rate for reading level searches in a K-12 library database. Mitinet Measures™ currently has reading scores for over 291,000 K-12 specific items.

Reading Programs

Records with...	Existing*	Change**	Add***	
Lexile®	3,354	629	14,512	433% increase
			7,066 MM^	643% increase w/MM^
Accelerated Reader®	21,840	21,670	793	4% increase
Reading Counts®	336	336	15,988	4,758% increase
Fountas & Pinnell®	99	0	6,806	6,875% increase

* Records in your database that already have a reading program measure.

This chart is a sample from a real client, showing the number of items that could have reading program data either added or updated.

RDA - Cataloging Rules for the Digital Age

RDA stands for **Resource Description and Access**, and it's the new cataloging standard for bibliographic records. AACR2, the old standard, was created to help condense information onto physical cards in the library card catalog. RDA acknowledges that with a digital format, abbreviations and limiting rules are no longer necessary, and when a library converts to RDA their MARC records contain more information in a more accessible format for a general user.

What Does Converting to RDA Do for a MARC Record?

There are many technical differences between RDA and AACR2 cataloging rules, but here are a few of the ways RDA impacts a user's search of the database.

RDA makes it easier to distinguish between authors and other contributors. By allowing the cataloger to qualify a name with the addition of a profession or occupation, and by removing the limits on the number of names allowed in the record (previously only three authors were allowed) RDA creates more opportunities for users to find works by a particular author, illustrator or other contributor.

RDA removes most abbreviations. AACR2 used many Latin abbreviations, which aren't in general use anymore as well as other abbreviations to save space. Now a cataloger can write *illustrations* rather than *ill*. or *publisher not identified* instead of *s.n.(the Latin abbreviation).* Fewer abbreviations make the information in the MARC record more understandable for more people, and help to create consistency.

RDA distinguishes between more modern material types. With all the new material types available now, RDA makes it easier to document these new material types, creating less confusion when it comes to organizing multiple versions of the same work.

Do You Need RDA Conversion?

The main reason for converting existing records to RDA is if you want all the MARC records in your database handled consistently. RDA is compatible with AACR2, so if you are receiving RDA records into your database now, it isn't necessary to convert your existing records for your database to continue to work properly.

You can't get something out of nothing

Even though RDA records have the capacity to contain much more information about the item they describe, just converting AACR2 records to RDA won't add information that isn't already there.

That's why we recommend that libraries who are getting an RDA conversion perform a database cleanup to fix errors, add missing information, subject headings and reading program data, and possibly a brief to full data service, which adds missing information to existing records.

These type of clean up services are best performed before RDA conversion, especially if a database has never had a cleanup before, or if it's been several years since the last cleanup.

Other Reasons to Convert to RDA

Your district or consortium is converting and you need to bring your database up to speed, the sooner the better.

You want to make the items in your collection easier for your patrons to find. RDA is better for the user since there's more information written in plain language.

You want to increase access points for your collection. Remember, more access points equals more discoverability, increasing collection circulation and minimizing material waste.

Use Data to Make an Informed Decision

Everyone responsible for the administration of public funds and the success of the students in their district has to make tough choices. Funds are tight and there are many things that need attention, no matter how big the school district. However, it's easier to be confident in your decision when you know what the results of that decision will be. That's why Mitinet has developed our **Database Diagnostic Report**.

What the Database Diagnostic Report Does

This simple, free report reviews your entire library collection database and provides information you can use to determine the quality of the MARC records that represent your collection. We export the database from your library's automation system, run it through our diagnostic program and produce an easy to read report with information on key MARC record standards. Then we go over the report with you to answer any questions.

Some of the things you can learn about your database...

The size of your collection, and how it's organized, both for the full catalog and by site. This helps you determine if there are sites where the collection database is managed particularly well or perhaps areas that need attention.

The number of items with errors or critical missing information. This is an indication of the number of items in your collection that may be underused. This can be used to help determine the potential cost of underused materials.

The number of subject headings for each record, in total and by collection. This helps you see if you could improve discoverability for areas of your collection by adding or enhancing the subject headings. It also indicates the number of items which could benefit from adding Kid-Friendly™ terminology.

The number of items with reading program information by the four reading programs we support. View how many of your MARC records currently have reading program information for Lexile®, Accelerated Reader®, Scholastic Reading Counts®, and Fountas & Pinnell®. You can also see how many you could add to your existing records, expanding the number of items you can more easily use with your chosen reading program before you even have to purchase another book.

The number of duplicate records. Not all duplicate records are errors, but reducing duplication streamlines the database and makes searches more effective.

The number of MARC records that would be affected by RDA conversion.

We know you need data to make big decisions. Mitinet's free Database Diagnostic Report offers you real, current information about the state of your library's MARC record database. And we believe that once you see what we can do for the quality and effectiveness of your database, the decision to use Mitinet to help make your library database more effective will be an easy one.

While it's true that we hope you'll consider joining Mitinet once you've reviewed the Database Diagnostic Report, you are under no obligation or pressure to purchase any of our services.

The North Coast Council Information Technology Center provides software support to several hundred K-12 Libraries in northeast Ohio.

To those who want to update their MARC records with reading level data, we always recommend subscribing to Mitinet Library Services...the service is both timely and cost-effective, the process is proven, and the results are impressive.

We seldom recommend vendors to our library customers, but Mitinet is an exception.

Greg Perciak, Library Services, North Coast Council - East, Ohio