

You are at: ALA.org » ASCLA » Volume 24, Number 2, 2002

## Volume 24, Number 2, 2002

---

### **Alleycat Provides Anywhere Anytime Library Service**

by Lauren Stokes

It's been almost two years since Tampa Bay Library Consortium's Anywhere-Anytime Library e-Catalog (Alleycat) went into service. Since that time, Alleycat has worked purrfectly — sometimes even better.

### **TBLC Fosters Resource Sharing**

The Tampa Bay Library Consortium (TBLC), established in 1979, is currently the largest in Florida with a membership that includes 95 libraries—six community colleges, three state university libraries, 25 private academic colleges and universities, four public school systems, 41 public and 16 special libraries. Through membership in TBLC, libraries in 12 counties serving over 3.8 million Floridians (about 30 percent of Florida's total population) have succeeded in creating a strong library automation infrastructure.

At the time of its founding, TBLC members envisioned a regional union catalog. However, it was not until 1998 when the concept of Alleycat was born that this began to become a reality. While many TBLC libraries provided Internet or dial-up access to their own catalogs, prior to implementation of Alleycat they did not share a common search tool. The Anywhere-Anytime Library provides access to the resources of many of these member libraries from anywhere at anytime via the World Wide Web.

With Alleycat, residents can seamlessly find materials owned by libraries in the region and request that these materials be delivered to their local library in a timely manner, all from their home, office, school or anywhere. Alternatively, if the item that is needed is on the shelf at a nearby library, the library user is able to go directly to the owning library and borrow the material.

Out of the 95 TBLC members, 36 libraries with 83 outlets are currently involved in the project. When completed, there will be 47 library systems from the TBLC area with a total of 107 outlets participating. A future goal is interoperability with other interlibrary loan (ILL) systems in the state.

### **Searching Alleycat**

Alleycat uses the Universal Resource Sharing Application (URSA) software by epixtech to search across vendor platforms and to provide patron authentication and interlibrary loan management. All Alleycat users connect to the catalog through the World Wide Web.

Library patrons authenticate in their home library's catalog while visitors use the "guest" login. A single search screen allows searching by title, author, subject, or ISBN in the catalogs of all participating libraries. Alleycat returns a title list of results, and duplicates are eliminated based on ISBN, OCLC number, or LCCN. The patron may either request a title or look at additional information, which includes bibliographic information and shelf status. Requests placed by authenticated patrons allow items to be delivered to their library of choice. This direct, unmediated service moves materials quickly from owning library to borrowing library in a cost-effective manner.

## Managing Interlibrary Loan

The "Extended Circulation" feature is what makes the URSA software unique. It provides each participating library with a virtual staff person to process interlibrary loans. Extended Circulation performs tasks such as:

- Circulating the item to the borrowing library
- Receiving the item into the borrowing library
- Creating a temporary item record in the borrowing library's catalog (which is used to track the loan to the patron)
- Notifying the patron that the item is available for pickup
- Managing the circulation of the item to the patron, and recording its return to the owning library

"Extended Circulation" automates the entire process. Each requested item has a unique request number. A library staff person enters this number or the permanent barcode number into Alleycat at each stage of the ILL cycle.

In a process similar to that found in e-commerce, each item's journey through the system is recorded. Library staff track items as they progress in status from "created" to "shipped" to "returned" to "complete." Patrons with active requests may track the shipping status of their own requests. The virtual staff person (Alleycat) even sends e-mail notification to patrons when the requested material is available for pickup. This feature alone enables participating libraries to provide service to patrons that is more efficient and reduces the demands on staff.

## Changes in Interlibrary Loan

Libraries participating in Alleycat have seen changes in the number and type of interlibrary loan requests. Most have experienced an increase in the number of non-OCLC interlibrary loans while stabilizing or reducing the number being requested through OCLC. Access for residents has increased while OCLC expenses are reduced or maintained. During the first year, 8,624 items were supplied. If these items were obtained from OCLC, the loaded cost would have been \$241,472 (based on the loaded cost price of \$28 per request). Compare this to the actual cost through Alleycat of \$68,992 (based on the loaded cost price of \$8 per request)—a savings of \$172,480.

Libraries in the project have been able to supply 75% of the ILL materials needed by patrons through Alleycat. For items not located in Alleycat, patrons turn to larger worldwide resource-sharing; the request goes to OCLC's Direct Request. This is considered the "Library of Last Resort" for Alleycat. TBLC is adding access to WorldCat,

the worldwide catalog of resources; LINCC, the catalog of all community colleges in Florida; LUIS, the catalog of all public colleges and universities in Florida; the State Library of Florida; and the Union List of Serials for Florida. Alleycat will submit requests found in these sources and those items not available from participating libraries to Direct Request. Alleycat will continue to track the request and perform the "extended circulation" functions when the item is received via OCLC.

Alleycat has brought about a major change in library loaning philosophy. Before this service, most libraries would not loan their videos or audios to patrons outside of their library system. The increased public demand for videos and audios, along with the ease of supplying these materials to the local region, has brought about this change.

## A Hit with Library Patrons

Library patron response to this value added service has been tremendous. Patrons have 24/7 access to over 6.3 million items from Tampa Bay area libraries. They can confidently expect the materials to arrive at their pickup location within 72 hours after the request is submitted, thanks to the Distance Learning Library Initiative (DLLI) statewide delivery service.

Patron satisfaction has been measured twice with e-mail surveys; one conducted at the beginning of March 2001 and one at the end of September 2001. Both surveys asked the same questions, with one exception. In September, an additional question about the patron's age range was asked. There was little difference in the responses between the two surveys. One significant difference was in use of the service from home. The percentage of people who used Alleycat from home increased from 53 percent in March to 79 percent in September.

Ninety-six percent of the respondents indicated that software was very easy or easy to use. Satisfaction with the service increased; more respondents indicated that they were "Delighted" with the service they received in obtaining materials. In both surveys, 92 percent of the patrons were either "Delighted" or "Satisfied" with the service.

For the September survey, an age range question was added. It was interesting to note that 65 percent of the patrons responding were between the ages of 41 and 65, 24 percent between the ages of 20-40, and the 66+ category made up only 11 percent of the respondents. Only one person under the age of 20 responded.

The survey comments express most of the sentiments about the service.

- "I'm very satisfied and find this to be one of the better services offered through any public facility."
- "Thank you for Alleycat. I love having easy access to materials my local library doesn't own."
- "So convenient for a busy person to reserve materials on their home computer and then just go and pick them up at the circulation desk. It really saves me a lot of time!!"
- "As a Stay-At-Home/Home schooling Mom of two children, this service is fabulous!!! I couldn't do my curriculum planning or my own personal enrichment and recreational reading without this service. I love it and tell anyone I can about it."

## Future Directions

Many patrons also offered suggestions to improve the system. From user comments a "Patron Wish List" was developed.

- All libraries in the state should participate in this virtual library.
- All media should be requestable.
- Be able to cancel requests. (Feature added in February 2001, but item must be in "Pending" status.)
- If home library has item available, have virtual library place request on home library's copy. (Currently they have to go to the library's Web site and repeat search to place the hold.)
- Renew items.
- Get all items requested.

It has been very rewarding for TBLC staff and members to see this service come about. Patrons have been enthusiastic about the service as it now stands, and it continues to expand. A Web portal, which will provide links to online databases, quality consumer health Web sites and e-books are being developed for 2002. TBLC has demonstrated with Alleycat that there is no limit to what can be done with interlibrary loans.

For additional information, visit [Alleycat](#) or the [project Web site](#).

Lauren Stokes is the Technology Coordinator at Tampa Bay Library Consortium, Inc. in Tampa, Florida.

---

[Copyright Statement](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Site Help](#) | [Site Index](#)

© 1996–2017 American Library Association

**ALA**AmericanLibraryAssociation

50 E Huron St., Chicago IL 60611 | 1.800.545.2433