

Freie Universität Berlin Library

Seamless Integration
with the Finances
Division



Image Credit: Bernd Wannemacher

Alma integration automated 90% of vendor invoice processing and paved the way for a complete digital collaboration.

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Leon Krauthausen, System Librarian



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About Freie Universität Berlin

Freie Universität Berlin, one of eleven research universities in the German Universities Excellence Initiative, is a leader in research and teaching. The university has 30,000 students in bachelor's and master's degree programs, 4,000 doctoral students, 376 professors, and a staff of 4,550. With many regional and international partners, Freie Universität Berlin has developed an outstanding international reputation ever since its founding in 1948 in response to persecution faced by students under the Soviet-controlled higher education system in the then-divided city of Berlin.

The Library System of Freie Universität Berlin includes the University Library (UB) and 15 departmental libraries, with access to holdings of around 8.5 million printed items, 70,000 e-journals, 500,000 e-books, and 1,600 databases. It is one of the largest library systems in Germany, with 3,300 working spaces and 300 staff members.

Inefficiency in the Process

Freie Universität Berlin uses the SAP enterprise resource planning software (SAP ERP 6.0) for its everyday financial tasks. There was some integrated communication between the financial system and the university's previous Library System; however, there was still a need for manual intervention on the part of personnel in the Finances Division for ensuring proper invoice management.

The Library System transfers about 25,000 invoices and related data to the Finances Division every year. Invoices for asset procurement and other library expenditures were handled manually, which entailed librarians entering data into the financial system. The Finances Division then had to assign staff to review the invoice information, accept or reject the request, manage payment, and then notify the library when the relevant payment was made.

The process was inefficient and time-consuming for the Finances Division staff, as well as frustrating for the library teams. The university was intent on streamlining the workflow, which required greater automation and a more comprehensive integration.

Alma Was Built to Integrate

Freie Universität Berlin has had an ongoing and close relationship with Ex Libris since 2000. The move to Ex Libris Alma as the Library System's library services platform was therefore a natural progression, which included active membership in the joint [ELUNA/IGeLU](#) Alma Working Group.

As a unified platform, Alma is the backbone of library management. However, it was also designed with built-in interoperability for seamless integration with other academic systems and financial software. Alma's open standards and integration templates facilitated collaboration among institutional colleagues at Freie Universität Berlin on a turnkey basis.

The integration between Alma and the Finances Division's [SAP system](#) was carried out right after Alma was implemented.

According to Leon Krauthausen, System Librarian of Freie Universität Berlin, "Implementing the [Alma integration profile](#) was quite easy and straightforward. We had to adapt a few workflows, but there was no need to change basic functionalities."

The current workflow for handling vendor invoices adds a greater automation and simplified collaboration between the Library System and the Finances Division. A member of the library staff creates an invoice record, either using the automated Purchase Order function or by manual entry. The invoice file is then automatically checked for accuracy and completeness before it is sent to the financial system. In the event of an error, the invoice is returned to Alma and set to “Review” status, with the reason for the rejection indicated in an accompanying note.

When the invoice is accepted, it automatically enters the Finances Division system for processing. Once the vendor is paid, the invoice status is updated accordingly, and payment confirmation is automatically entered into Alma.

Automation and Flexibility

Alma integration with the Finances Division system of Freie Universität Berlin has had a significant impact on the workflow for handling the Library System’s invoices. It has reduced the duplication of effort and the number of steps involved, as well as automating key aspects of the process.

With the Alma integration, about 90% of invoices can now be paid through the financial system and updated in Alma without any manual intervention by Finances Division staff members.

As a result, the Finances Division personnel have noted that importing and exporting the invoices is easy, fast and very reliable.

In addition, Alma provides the Library System with a broad variety of options to manage and automate increasingly complex interactions with the financial system. Over 200 APIs give programmatic access to data and workflows managed in Alma and other solutions in the Ex Libris Higher Ed Platform.

The Library System is planning to leverage an Alma API to streamline the transfer of PDF invoice files to the Finances Division. Once this is implemented, the transmission of this type of invoices to the financial system will be essentially completely digital.

As Leon noted, “Alma provides a number of OTB options to integrate with financial systems. Even if an institution does not make use of all of them, it provides great flexibility. And thanks to the possibilities provided by APIs, Alma is well prepared for the future.”



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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](#).

