The University of Applied Sciences St. Pölten in Austria

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Ex Libris Alma: A Tremendous Benefit for Small Libraries
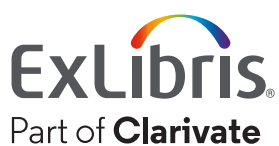
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About St. Pölten University of Applied Sciences:

The University of Applied Sciences St. Pölten in Lower Austria was founded in 1996. The library and its five staff members provide the approximately 3,400 students with more than 47,000 resources, including around 200 newspaper subscriptions and various online resources. In total, 13,000 user accounts are managed in Alma. The campus library also includes the library of the Bertha von Suttner Private University and a branch of the St. Pölten public library. All three libraries are open to the public and offer their services to people from outside the institution.

From Alephino to Alma – Modernizing the Library

In the early 2000s, St. Pölten University of Applied Sciences (UAS) began managing its scientific library using Alephino by Ex Libris. Over the years, however, this solution proved to be insufficient for the needs of a modern library. Electronic resources were managed with great difficulty and the lack of functionality such as interlibrary loans caused an increasing administrative burden. On top of that, statistical data was only available on a limited basis.

Together, a group of 14 Austrian libraries ventured to select a new library management software. Among them was St. Pölten UAS, the first university of applied sciences in Austria. After an EU-wide tendering process for new library software, this association ultimately awarded the contract to Ex Libris Alma. The changeover was completed in August 2017 – without the library having to close for a single day.

Alma at a Smaller Library

Both the set-up of Alma and the training of the library staff took place without complications. Since Alma is provided in the cloud, the library did not have to invest in additional hardware or IT support after the changeover.

In supporting the day-to-day operations of the St. Pölten library, Alma has proven to be flexible, convenient and effective. Through standardized and automated processes, Alma saves the librarians significant time, which they can use on value-added tasks instead of on time-consuming administrative jobs or the maintenance of their own IT infrastructure. This is an enormous relief for St. Pölten's librarians. For example, the previously lengthy and complicated interlibrary loan process has been replaced by a paperless, automated process that takes no more than a minute or two without intervention. The management of electronic resources has also been simplified significantly: while ebooks previously had to be painstakingly catalogued individually or imported via data import, they can now be conveniently imported with a few simple clicks, as Christian Kieslinger, head of the St. Pölten UAS Library, points out. With the introduction of the network zone, the acquisition of new content has also become very convenient and effortless. Ebooks could be ordered via a single button and automatically fed in without further intervention – and discovered within 24 or 48 hours via the Primo search engine. Ultimately, the Alma library management system helps smaller libraries like St. Pölten cope with the diverse demands of library operations by freeing up librarians to concentrate on the essentials of their work.

"As far as interlibrary loan is concerned, it's just wonderful to work without any paper at all. We could not have imagined that, and the convenience of using e-resources had not existed before."

Christian Kieslinger, Head of the Library, University of Applied Sciences at St. Pölten

No Technical Issues

Kieslinger is also fully satisfied in terms of reliability and security, and points out that there have been virtually no technical problems with Alma since 2017. In addition to the support from Ex Libris, he praises the active exchange with other libraries in the worldwide Alma community. In this context, the St. Pölten Library is in active contact not only with colleagues within the Austrian Library Network or Germany, but also in India, Australia and China.

"What I really enjoy is the worldwide community. It makes you aware that even as a small library you are not alone."

Christian Kieslinger,Head of the Library, University of Applied Sciences at St. Pölte

The Transition to Remote Work and Support

Like society as a whole, higher education institutions were hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. Cloud-based library solutions proved to be a huge advantage during the lockdown. Alma enabled the library staff of St. Pölten UAS to adapt to new remote conditions quickly and without major problems, as the staff members were able to log into the system remotely and complete most of their regular tasks from home. For example, the acquisition and, in some cases, the cataloguing of resources was possible without any issues. The skyrocketing demand for ebooks was handled by Alma without major difficulties. Other measures taken during the COVID-19 shutdown included the introduction of shelf ordering and the switch-off of automatic renewals and other features via Alma, which helped immensely to reduce the administrative burden. Overall, Alma decisively helped the St. Pölten library continue to support faculty and students during the shutdown.

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