

2023

Review of Making Your Tools Work for You: Building and Maintaining an Integrated Technical Ecosystem for Digital Archives and Libraries

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Recommended Citation

Leimkuehler, Ryan (2023) "Review of Making Your Tools Work for You: Building and Maintaining an Integrated Technical Ecosystem for Digital Archives and Libraries," *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies*: Vol. 10, Article 4.

Available at: <https://elischolar.library.yale.edu/jcas/vol10/iss1/4>

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Max Eckard. *Making Your Tools Work for You: Building and Maintaining an Integrated Technical Ecosystem for Digital Archives and Libraries*. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2020.

Max Eckard begins his book by stating that he is an archivist and librarian and thus has never been a developer. This declaration establishes the audience for *Making Your Tools Work for You*. Eckard does pull heavily from experience developing and integrating systems such as Aeon, Archives-Space, Archivematica, Archive-It, and DSpace, and his familiarity helps ground the higher-level theory discussed in the book. This work is a resource for practicing archivists and librarians struggling to understand and engage with their technical ecosystems, and it provides insight into how to make decisions on technology when people are not information technologies professionals. Eckard establishes some disclaimers for the audience and states that the technical landscape shifts and changes; much of the guidance to specific tools may be out of date, but the techniques on how to approach tools and systems should remain evergreen. *Making Your Tools Work for You* is 335 pages and packed with content, but each chapter builds on the previous ones so this book, to be most effective, needs to be read from cover to cover. Once the reader is familiar with the concepts, they could then use it more as a reference or refresher for segments that pertain to a particular topic. Each chapter concludes with discussion questions for the reader to engage with or use to guide their own project. According to Eckard, “What I have attempted to write here is simply an introduction, an overview. Taking such a broad trajectory necessarily means that I haven’t been able to explore every aspect of systems integration” (ix).

Eckard explains that archivists, digital curators, and systems developers make use of many different tools and systems in their work, but unfortunately there are none that cover all aspects of the archival enterprise. As professionals, we are expected to knit systems together and develop efficient workflows from accession to ingest to access. Chapters 1 and 2 introduce readers to the concept of systems integration and provide hands-on examples from the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan. These introductory chapters offer a broad approach to systems integration and make an argument that it can save time and resources and improve the quality and reliability of the entire workflow. It is in these beginning chapters that Eckard establishes the foundational techniques to approaching the various systems at work in any organization and offers his own approach to establishing cooperation for efficiency. He walks readers through various types of integrations institutions face or can implement such as vertical, horizontal, spoke and hub, and several others. It is through this that the author establishes his expertise and helps even the most novice reader engage with the topic.

Chapters 3–6 are where the rubber hits the road, and readers can see the specifics of tool selection, application, and various methodologies for implementation. One of the most important sections of the book discusses how to engage with integration when professionals have so many options in front of them. Implementing key strategies like analyzing the function and purpose of the tools and developing a road map will help archivists narrow the scope of their projects. Eckard explores the concept of metadata at an introductory level that helps even the newest archivist understand the topic and through the chapter builds in complexity as he introduces readers to APIs (Application Programming Interface), DACS (Describing Archives: A Content Standard), and PREMIS (Preservation Metadata Implementation Strategies). APIs are a major focus in this

chapter and essentially allow two applications to talk to each other, a key piece to integration. The final part of this section takes the reader through specific systems integrations using cases on interoperability protocols. One such example is the original SWORD (Simple Web-service Offering Repository Deposit) project, an interoperability standard that allows digital repositories to accept the deposit of content from multiple sources in different formats. The project offers specialized systems integration and data interoperability, command line interfaces, and plug-in architectures for users. It enables clients to talk to various repository servers and is the most common data interoperability protocol in use in the library and archives domain. It is through exploration of these systems and processes that Eckard shows his expertise in the subject and passes that knowledge on to the reader.

Eckard states that chapter 7 may be one of his favorite chapters, as it looks at various examples of systems integration “in the wild” with case studies on diverse integrations. This chapter is based on interviews with archivists about their systems integrations. The author asked participants questions such as “What was the development process like?” and “Could you give a high-level overview of the methods used for integration?” These real-world examples help connect the previous chapters with the actual process of implementing integration projects. Projects discussed included Project Electron, ArchiveSpace–CollectionSpace integration, and Preservica–ArchivesSpace integration, to name a few. This chapter in systems integration demonstrates key themes and takeaways for anyone approaching an integration project.

Chapters 8–11 look at next steps for those who have decided to undertake a systems integration project and the specific work to make sure that the integration continues seamlessly. Part of the process for archivists is identifying and defining their problem and the results they want from the project. The success of any project boils down to talking with users so that the solution to a problem does not cause more problems down the line. Eckard also discusses the value of project management to help ensure the project is realistic and has enough detail to develop a project team. He argues that even if a library or archives is not ready for a full-fledged systems integration, there are ways to get a handle on managing the “seams” between systems (217). A refreshing acknowledgment from the author addressed the existence of imposter syndrome during a project on the scale of systems integration. It is important to ensure that this does not influence the goals or execution of the project.

In chapter 12 Eckard concludes by examining some of the broader issues for libraries, archives, and technology. He drives home the argument that the book introduces tools that are simply a means to a greater end of supporting archival endeavors. To be successful in an integration project, an archivist must know standards like DACS, because the tools in question rely so heavily on these foundational principals.

Making Your Tools Work for You is a pragmatic introduction to the what, why, and how of systems integration. It never bogs down readers in theoretical discussions without providing real-world examples. Eckard concludes with a section on community and leaves with a final plea that your tools should not only work for you but should also keep users and accessibility in mind. The book is a great resource for any professional that wants to learn more about how to begin a systems integration project.