

AUTOMATING THE K-12 LIBRARY

BY NANCY KIM

About 10 years ago, I began to automate my school library. The decision wasn't difficult—rather, it was a matter of survival! I was employed half-time to run the library for 360 students in grades K-10. Providing weekly library classes for all of the students, purchasing and processing new materials, and keeping up with all the required daily tasks was more than enough to fill 20 hours per week. Just processing the check-ins and check-outs for one class took about 30 minutes! After visiting a local junior high school for a demonstration of its library software-management system, I was converted. This system could reduce the check-in/check-out process for each class to less than five minutes!

I talked with my principal, who encouraged me to explore automation systems for the library. Our school had just purchased school management software from a company that also published a library automation program. When I inquired about it, I was told the company was offering the library software free to institutions using the school management system.

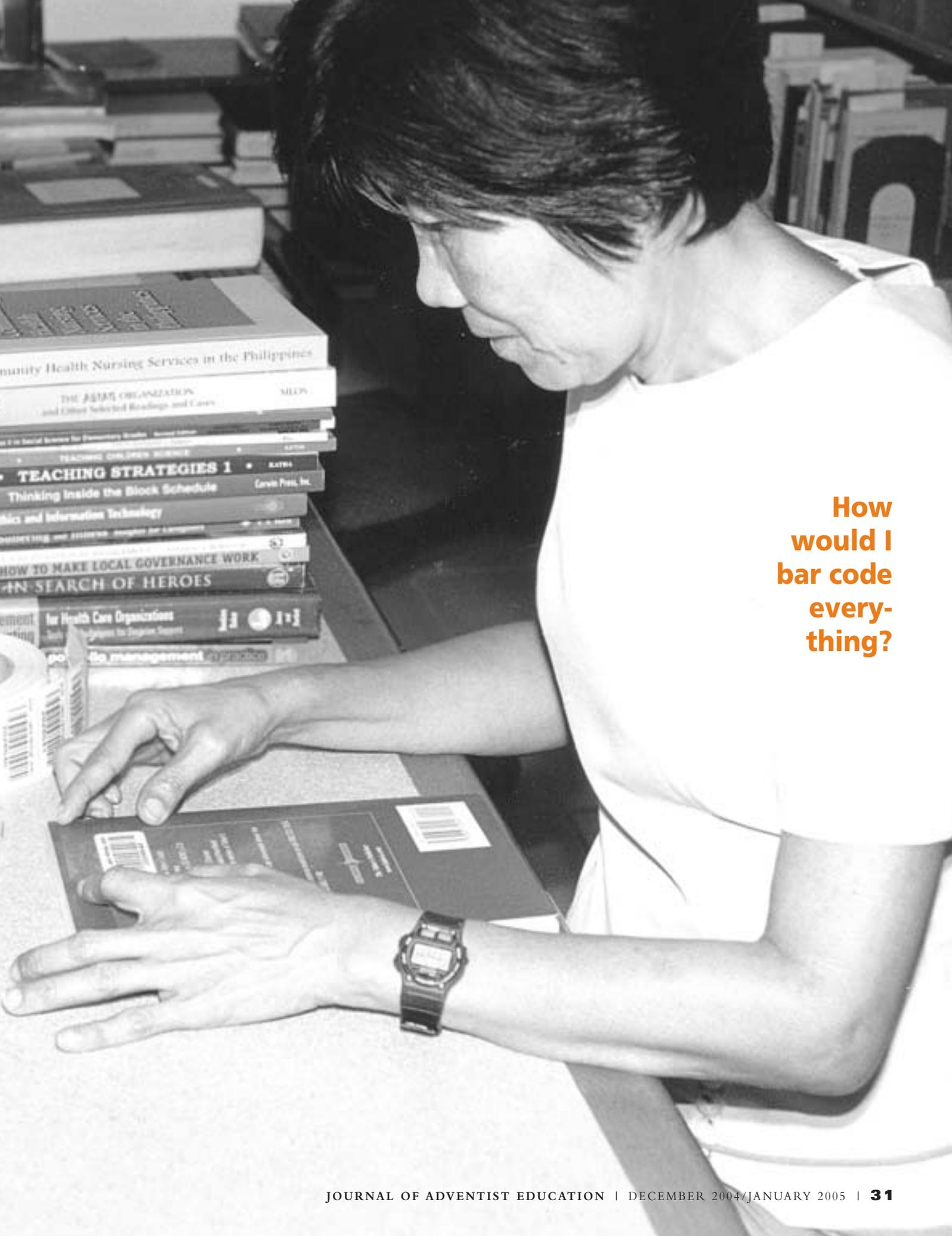
I began with the free circulation module. A year later, we added the cataloging module; the next year, the Online Patron Access Catalog (OPAC) module. The cost was about \$1,500, spread over two years. Of course, we also needed hardware to run the software. This wasn't really a problem because my school had begun to equip each classroom, including the library, with at least one computer.

Two additional critical decisions had to be made at this point. First, could I do a retrospective conversion (convert the manual catalog to a computerized one)? Second, how would I bar code everything? To do a retrospective conversion, the shelf list must be nearly perfect. Ours wasn't. I could either (1) fix the shelf list and send it in for a retrospective conversion, or (2) try to do the data entry myself. At the time, Option 2 seemed best.

I spent the summer and Christmas vacation working on this project. I started with the parts of the

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collection that circulate the most and did that entire section during those interruption-free times. I continue to do data entry as I purchase new materials or when older materials circulate. I use databases to download Machine Readable Cataloging (MARC) records and save time. I would like to be able to say that the conversion is finished, but it isn't yet.

Solving the bar-code problem was much easier. We organized a "bar code party." One Sunday, we enticed about 10 volunteers by providing lots of snacks, and set to work bar coding some 8,000 items. New acquisitions are bar coded as they are processed, so keeping up is easy.

I have never regretted the extra work involved in automating my school library, as the benefits far outweigh the difficulties. It saves me a lot of time in all areas of library work. When I order new books, I order and receive the MARC records via the Internet. It takes only about three minutes to download the records for a hundred or more books, and then they are all shelf ready.

Library Automation Systems

There are probably almost as many school library management solutions as situations and needs. Finding the system that

Common Features

- Circulation
- Cataloging
- OPAC
- Administration
- Multi-platform
- Network compatibility
- Retrospective conversion
- Multi-licensing
- Technical support
- Patron maintenance
- Z39.50 client/server capabilities
- Acquisitions
- Icon driven
- Basic and advanced searching
- Multiple types of reports
- Print spine labels, catalog cards, etc.
- Centralized library management
- Specific reading program searches
- Catalog Web sites
- Web server
- Create bibliographies
- Inventory
- MARC records
- Reports
- Patron access
- Customer satisfaction

Library Automation Software Companies

1. Book Systems, Inc., 721 Clinton Ave., Suite 11, Huntsville, AL 35801; (800) 219-6571 (U.S.), (256) 533-9746 (International); <http://www.booksys.com>

- Concourse: \$799 just for database software, \$1,295 to add circulation

Book Systems caters to churches and church schools. Best features: the graphical interfaces and reports. The company provides grant writers to help you with funding.

2. CASPR Library Systems, Inc., P.O. Box 246, Saratoga, CA 95070; (800) 852-2777 or (408) 741-2322; <http://www.caspr.com>

- LibraryCom, Web-based service: \$300 per year, includes tech support

- LibraryWorld: desktop software, \$2,000 to get started

CASPR manages, backs up, maintains, and upgrades everything for you.

3. COMPanion Corp., 1831 Fort Union Blvd., Salt Lake City, UT 84121; (801) 943-7277 (U.S. & Canada); (801) 943-7277 (International); <http://www.companioncorp.com>

- Alexandria: \$2,000 for the basic program

This software handles an unlimited collection size.

4. Follett Software Company, 1391 Corporate Dr., McHenry, IL 60050-7041; (800) 323-3397 or (815) 344-8700; <http://www.fsc.follett.com>

- Circulation Plus: \$1,400 for the first module

Follett is one of the leaders in K-12 library automation software. Check out all of their modules and add-on components; they excel in services offered. An extremely helpful and timesaving service is their free Web-based book-ordering service, Titlewave (<http://www.titlewave.com>).

5. Gateway Software Corporation, P.O. Box 367, Fromberg, MT 59029-0467; (800) 735-3637; (406) 668-7661; <http://www.gscweb.com>

LMS Online: cost based on student enrollment

Gateway is an Application System Provider service. Their Web OPAC, Meriwether, works very much like LibraryCom mentioned above, i.e., the company hosts the software and manages everything for you.

6. Hunter Systems, 3500 Blue Lake Drive, Suite 400, Birmingham, AL 35243; (800) 326-0527 or (205) 968-6500; <http://www.huntersystems.com>

Librarian's Edge: The NAD has exclusively endorsed this company's school management program, School Minder; grade book program, GradeQuick; and financial program, Accountrak, thus guaranteeing special prices for Adventist schools. Although Librarian's Edge isn't part of the endorsed package, the company appears willing to offer the program to Adventist schools at a special price, as well. The Hunter Systems representative did estimate that for a school of approximately 400 students, the price of the software would be approximately \$1,200. If a school is using School Minder, one of the advantages of using Librarian's Edge, in addition to the low price, is that the School Minder database interfaces with Librarian's Edge. The company offers strong support both within and outside the U.S.

7. Insignia Software, 10123 99th St., Suite 1520, Edmonton, AB,

Canada T5J 2I4; (866) 428-3997, (780) 920-0350, or (866) 334-4747; <http://www.insigniasoftware.com>

Insignia Library System: \$4,000-\$5,000 for a full system

This company touts its "no add-on" concept. Customers do not have to pay more to add modules. Even tech support is free for one year. The system can handle an unlimited number of items.

8. Mandarin Library Automation, Inc., P.O. Box 272308, Boca Raton, FL 33427-2308; (800) 426-7477 or (561) 995-4010; <http://www.mlalolutions.com>

Mandarin M3 Core: \$3,750 for the complete package; \$750 for a Web OPAC

Strengths: reports feature, user friendliness, and 24/7 support.

9. New Generation Technologies, Inc., Dept. 844, P.O. Box 34069, Seattle, WA 98124 (U.S. Division); Dept. 844, 101-1001 W. Broadway, Vancouver, BC, Canada V6H 4E4 (Canadian Division); (800) 661-7112; <http://www.librarysoft.com>

- LibrarySoft, basic: \$495, handles thousands of items

- LibrarySoft, complete: \$595, also handles thousands of items

The low price suggests that they are like CASPR's and Gateway's. They are not. The software resides on your local hardware like Follett's and Sagebrush's. You pay separately for tech support: \$149 a year; and for upgrades/revisions, also \$149 a year.

10. Sagebrush Corporation, 3601 Minnesota Dr., Suite 550, Minneapolis, MN 55435; (800) 533-5430; <http://www.sagebrushcorp.com>

- Athena, Level 1, 3,000 or fewer items: \$795 stand-alone

- Level 2, 3,000-6,000 items: \$1,295 stand-alone

- Level 3, 6,000+ items: \$2,495 stand-alone

Multi-user at any level: an additional \$995

- Spectrum: \$4,995 for the complete package to get started

Both of these programs offer one year of free tech support. This company is one of the leaders in the field of library automation software and has an excellent reputation for customer service and top-notch products.

11. Softlink America Inc., 5482 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 1540, Los Angeles, CA 90036; (877) 454-2725; <http://www.softlinkamerica.com>

ALICE: \$1,495 initial cost, can handle up to 150,000 items

If you keep your support current, you receive all revisions and upgrades free. The system uses a fingerprint reader for checkout—no library cards. Softlink America is the North American division of an Australian company, Softlink International. The program is used widely in school libraries in Australia.

12. Surpass Software, 517 Oothcalooga St., Suite C, Calhoun, GA 30701; (877) 625-2657 toll-free (U.S.) or (706) 625-5399; <http://www.SurpassSoftware.com>

- Surpass SL: \$1,060 for collections of 5,000 or fewer, stand-alone

- Surpass Select: \$3,000 for collections of more than 5,000, multi-user

For Surpass Select, the company lets you select the modules you need to "design your own suite." Surpass Select can handle an unlimited number of items. The strengths of these two programs are their ease of use and flexibility. The company is acquainted with Adventist schools—they have sold their product to some.



Children enjoy finding books with the online catalog.

is right for you and your library can be a daunting task. As I was doing research for this article, I found that most systems have the same features. What makes the difference between the high-priced systems and the more affordable ones is mostly the optional “bells and whistles.” On pages 32 and 33, you will find two lists: (1) the features that are common to the majority of library-management systems, and (2) school library-automation systems, with company name and contact information, price, and unique and/or special features. Neither list is exhaustive, although I have tried to offer a range of systems, including ones marketed outside the U.S.

The prices listed for the different vendors are approximate and subject to change. Also, each of these software companies is working to improve its software regularly. New features will probably be available in the next few months.

Conclusion

Check out these Web sites, and look for some others. Call the companies, talk to a sales representative, and ask for or download the demos. Also, find some schools in your area that use library automation systems and visit them. Talk to librarians from an automated library. Secure funding if necessary; be sure to include enough to pay for technical support, as it is well

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worth it. Look for specials. Many of these companies offer discounts from time to time, or they may be willing to establish a preferred relationship with you.

After researching a number of systems, choose the one you like and feel most comfortable using. Then automate your library. You’ll be glad you did. ☞



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