AUTOMATION: WHAT LIBRARIANS MUST KNOW

PATRICK AGWU

Chairman,
Information Technology Section
Nigerian Library Association
Head, Technical, Infrastructure and Digital Services
University of Ibadan
08133972622
uzo123ng@gmail.com, pu.agwu@mail.ui.edu.ng

What Every Librarian Should Know About Automation

Automation is transforming the way libraries operate, empowering librarians to enhance services, streamline workflows, and better serve their communities.

This presentation will guide you through the key aspects of library automation, from understanding the differences between automation and digitization to implementing successful automation strategies.

Conventional vs. Innovative Library Processes and Operations

Conventional Processes

Manual Acquisition, cataloging and circulation , paper-based patron records, and reliance on physical spaces and resources.

Innovative Processes

Automated circulation, online catalogs, digital patron management, and leveraging technology to expand services beyond the physical library.

The Shift

Embracing automation allows libraries to improve efficiency, reduce costs, and provide more accessible and engaging user experiences.

Automation vs. Digitization: What's the Difference?

1

Automation

Automating manual processes, such as circulation, cataloging, and patron management, to improve efficiency and productivity.

2

Digitization

Converting physical materials, like books and documents, into digital formats to enhance access and preservation.
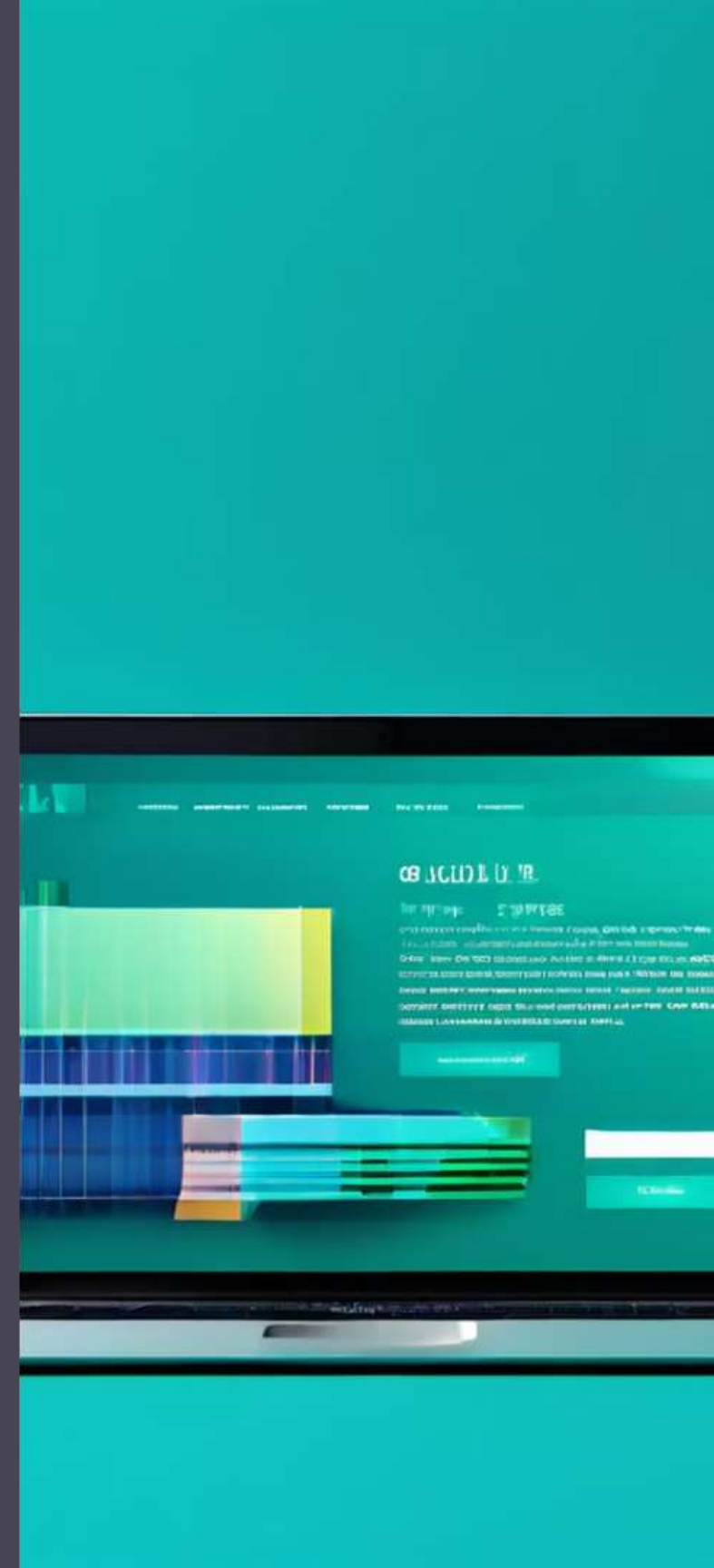
3

The Synergy

Automation and digitization work hand-in-hand to create a more seamless and accessible library experience.

4

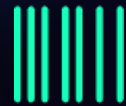Automation is about process while digitization is about content.
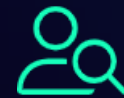
Library Automation: Examples

Integrated Library Systems

Manage circulation, cataloging, and patron data in a centralized platform.

Automated Check-out/Return

Self-service stations and RFID technology for efficient item handling.

Online Catalogs

Provide digital access to library collections and enable remote searches. (Discovery)

Automated Notifications

Notify patrons of due dates, holds, and other account updates.

Integrated Library Management Systems: Open Source vs Proprietary

Integrated Library Management Systems (ILMS) are comprehensive software solutions that streamline the operations and management of libraries. This presentation will explore the key differences between open-source and proprietary ILMS options, highlighting their respective advantages and disadvantages.

Open Source ILMS

1 **Community-driven**

Open-source ILMS are developed and maintained by a community of contributors, fostering innovation and responsiveness to user needs.

2 **Customizable**

Users can modify the source code to tailor the ILMS to their specific requirements, ensuring a perfect fit for their library.

3 **Cost-effective**

Open-source ILMS are available at little or no cost, making them an attractive option for libraries with limited budgets.

Advantages of Open Source ILMS

Flexibility

Open-source ILMS can be customized to meet the unique needs of each library, ensuring a perfect fit.

Community Support

A strong community of users and developers provides ongoing support, training, and updates for open-source ILMS.

Cost Savings

With no licensing fees, open-source ILMS can significantly reduce a library's operating costs.

Disadvantages of Open Source ILMS

Technical Complexity

Implementing and maintaining open-source ILMS may require specialized technical expertise, which can be a challenge for some libraries.

Limited Support

While the community provides support, the level of assistance may vary, and response times can be unpredictable.

Potential Security Risks

Open-source software can be vulnerable to security threats if not properly maintained and updated.

Proprietary ILMS

1

Turnkey Solution

Proprietary ILMS are ready-to-use, with pre-configured features and functionalities, simplifying the implementation process.

2

Professional Support

Proprietary ILMS come with dedicated support teams, ensuring timely assistance and issue resolution.

3

Continuous Updates

Proprietary ILMS providers regularly release updates and new features, keeping the software up-to-date.

Advantages of Proprietary ILMS

Reliability

Proprietary ILMS are backed by established vendors, ensuring the software's stability and long-term viability.

Comprehensive Support

Proprietary ILMS providers offer comprehensive support, including training, maintenance, and regular updates.

Streamlined Experience

Proprietary ILMS typically have a more polished and user-friendly interface, simplifying the user experience.

Disadvantages of Proprietary ILMS

Higher Costs

Proprietary ILMS often come with significant licensing fees and ongoing maintenance costs, which can be a burden for some libraries.

Limited Customization

Proprietary ILMS may have less flexibility in terms of customization, as users are typically restricted to the vendor's pre-defined features.

Vendor Lock-in

Switching to a different proprietary ILMS can be challenging and costly, leading to potential vendor lock-in.

Conclusion: Choosing the Right ILMS

1

Assess Needs

Carefully evaluate your library's specific requirements, budgets, and IT capabilities to determine the most suitable ILMS.

2

Evaluate Options

Thoroughly research both open-source and proprietary ILMS, considering their features, support, and long-term sustainability.

3

Pilot and Implement

Conduct a pilot implementation and gather feedback before making a final decision on the ILMS to adopt.

Library Automation: Significance

Improved Efficiency

Automation streamlines workflows, reduces errors, and frees up staff time for more strategic tasks.

Enhanced User Experience

Automated services and digital access improve patron convenience and satisfaction.

Data-Driven Decisions

Automation generates valuable data insights to support informed decision-making.

Cost Savings

Automation can lead to long-term cost reductions through improved productivity and resource optimization.

Library Automation: Evaluation and Selection

Assess Needs

Identify the library's specific automation requirements and pain points.

Involve Stakeholders

Collaborate with staff, IT, and patrons to ensure the selected solution meets everyone's needs.

1

2

3

Research Options

Evaluate integrated library systems, cloud-based solutions, and specialized tools.

Library Automation: Implementation

1

2

3

4

Plan Carefully

Develop a detailed implementation roadmap, allocate resources, and identify potential challenges.

Train Staff

Provide comprehensive training to ensure staff are comfortable and confident with the new systems.

Engage Patrons

Communicate the benefits of automation and offer support to help patrons adapt to the changes.

Continually Optimize

Monitor usage, gather feedback, and make iterative improvements to the automated processes.

Conclusion and Key Takeaways

1 **Embrace Automation**

Automation is a powerful tool for modernizing library operations and enhancing the patron experience.

2 **Align with Digitization**

Integrating automation and digitization strategies can create a truly transformative library ecosystem.

3 **Involve Stakeholders**

Successful library automation requires buy-in and collaboration from staff, IT, and patrons.

4 **Commit to Continuous Improvement**

Regularly evaluate and optimize your automated systems to ensure they continue to meet evolving needs.