

OWLSnet Partnership Report

Prepared for Nicolet Federated Library System Board

December 1, 2008

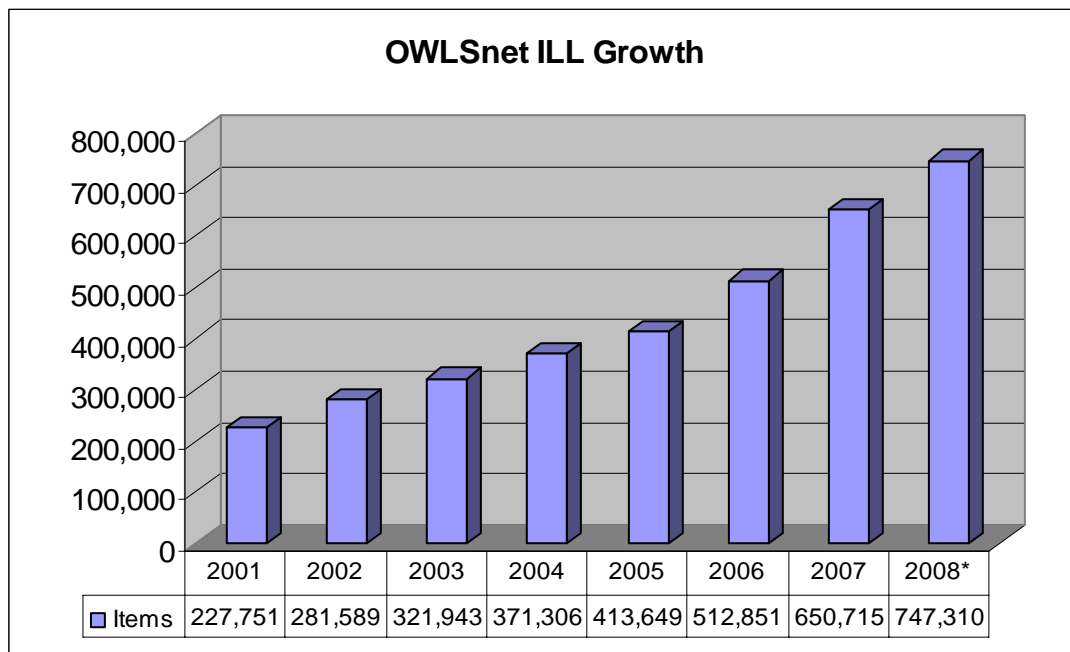
In 1995, the Outagamie Waupaca Library System and Nicolet Federated Library System entered into a partnership to provide a shared, integrated library system (OWLSnet) to OWLS and NFLS member libraries. While OWLSnet's primary mission is to provide a shared computer system to facilitate resource sharing and assist member libraries in increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of their operations, many additional services have been added over the years, e.g., Internet access, electronic resources, email, antivirus/security software.

Highlights of Past Year

Listed below are significant activities that have occurred since December 2007.

- OWLSnet upgraded its Innovative Millennium software to the long-awaited Release 2007. The new software release fixed a number of problems and included enhancements.
- OWLSnet continued to develop InfoSoup in order to enhance patron experience with the online catalog. Many new features were added.
 - What's Simmering is a new blog that contains news, tips, and other highlights about InfoSoup and related resources.
 - The "Community Reviews" feature allows patrons to post reviews for items contained in the catalog, and the "Ratings" feature allows patrons to rate any items in the catalog.
 - Many additional booklists have been added to InfoSoup. Over one hundred lists of materials are available to readers, listeners, and viewers of all ages.
 - A new "Forgot Your PIN?" feature allows patrons to reset their PINs on the My Account login page.
 - "My Lists" allows patrons to mark items they want to add to a list, name their lists, then edit them as they wish. Any patron may save multiple lists of materials.
- Using equipment and software obtained through an LSTA grant, five Screencasts have been created and added to InfoSoup. Each screencast is brief video demonstration of how to use a particular feature of the catalog. Current topics include adding a review, adding ratings, resetting your PIN, freezing holds, and using the "My Lists" feature.
- The InfoSoup PR Committee conducted a successful YouTube video contest, distributed InfoSoup bags and bookmarks for National Library Week, and conducted a poster campaign for Library Card Sign-up Month.
- An LSTA grant received by OWLS and NFLS allowed a new online language learning program, TELL ME MORE, to be added to InfoSoup. This comprehensive program is suitable for beginning and advanced language learners and includes Spanish, English, French, German, Italian, and Dutch courses for every day and business language.

- Public wireless Internet access is now available in all 16 OWLS locations and in 20 NFLS locations. This project was funded by OWLSnet, local libraries, and LSTA grants.
- TEACH Wisconsin subsidized bandwidth was increased for the connections from 35 member libraries to OWLSnet. OWLSnet also increased its Internet bandwidth from 12.0 mbps to 18.0 mbps.
- A committee of representatives from NFLS and OWLS libraries completed an evaluation of workstation management software, recommending SAM from Comprise Technologies. A contract was signed that will provide SAM software to interested OWLSnet libraries.
- Resource sharing among OWLSnet libraries is continuing to increase dramatically.



*Estimate based on January through October activity

- OWLS has applied for an LSTA grant to fund the purchase of AirPac software from Innovative. AirPac will provide an optimized version of InfoSoup for use on mobile devices. While the grant finished first in its category, final funding decisions have not been announced. However, it is likely that funding will be received and AirPac will be implemented during 2009.

Current Activities

Listed below are some significant activities that are currently underway or that are scheduled to occur in the next few months.

- NFLS and OWLS are working with Brown County Library (BCL) on the possibility of BCL joining OWLSnet. A draft proposal has been prepared for BCL, and NFLS has applied for an LSTA grant that would cover some of the costs of migrating BCL to OWLSnet.

- OWLSnet is beginning the process of installing SAM workstation management software on member library public computers. The software has been installed for testing at two locations, and installation at other libraries will begin this month. It is anticipated that software installation at participating libraries will be completed during the next three to five months.
- OWLSnet libraries are currently in the process of implementing the use of transit slips printed by their receipt printers. In the past, staff has filled out transit slips by hand. Transit slips will now be printed automatically when materials are scanned, saving staff time and reducing sorting errors.
- OWLSnet is beginning the process of installing Net Support Notify software on staff computers at member libraries. This software will allow OWLSnet to broadcast messages to staff at member libraries, reducing the need to call all libraries during certain types of service outages (e.g., Internet connection is down, email is down).
- NFLS has applied for an LSTA grant to help subsidize the cost of installing public wireless Internet access at additional NFLS libraries. It is anticipated that the grant will be awarded and that installation will be completed before summer.
- At the November OWLSnet Administrative Advisory Committee meeting, member libraries agreed that the E-Commerce software module should be purchased from Innovative. The addition of this software will enable library patrons to pay fines, fees, and bills online with their credit cards. Because of the complex nature of implementing online payment in a consortium environment, it is likely that implementation could take much of next year.

Challenges

- The biggest challenge facing OWLSnet is the potential membership of Brown County Library. If BCL were to join, it would have a major impact on OWLSnet and its member libraries. BCL membership would be likely to increase most activity levels by 50%. There are three primary areas of concern about BCL membership in OWLSnet that would need to be addressed. Differences in policies and procedures would need to be resolved. OWLSnet and BCL would need to agree on financial arrangements, and resource sharing concerns would need to be addressed.
- The development of OWLSnet has led to an explosive increase in the volume of resource sharing. While increased resource sharing has improved service for library patrons, it has placed a significant burden on library staff and the delivery service. In addition, delivery service costs continue to increase. Regardless of whether Brown County Library joins OWLSnet, it is likely that steps will need to be taken to curtail the growth in resource sharing because the current growth pattern is not sustainable by the two systems or their member libraries.
- Adequate bandwidth continues to be a challenge for OWLSnet. While OWLSnet has regularly increased its Internet bandwidth, this bandwidth is often being used to capacity. While the BCN network has made member library bandwidth easier to add, it is crucial that the TEACH Wisconsin program be adequately funded in the next state budget.