

# The VALE Virtual Catalog: A Review

Prepared by the VALE Website Committee – December 2006

Ray Schwartz, chair

Prepared by Mary Marks

## Statement

In June, 2006 the VALE Website Committee was charged with the review of the VALE Virtual Catalog (VVC). The intent of the review was to examine the catalog on several fronts including:

- hardware and software issues
- functionality and usability
- current participation by VALE libraries
- other available services

This preliminary review included discussion among committee members and colleagues about usage and viability, input from other VALE committees with regard to functionality, an examination of other similar catalogs and systems, and a clean up of participating libraries' connection information in order to provide a clearer picture of where the VVC currently stands. The results of this review are detailed below, along with a series of recommendations to the VALE Executive Committee regarding the future of the VALE Virtual Catalog.

## Background

Interest in the VALE Virtual Catalog dates back to the fall of 2002, when the Interlibrary Loan/Resource Sharing Committee inquired about the feasibility of using SiteSearch to create a Z39.50 union catalog. In October of 2002, the VALE Executive Committee approved funding to cover the cost of Dave Hoover's development of a pilot virtual catalog for demonstration at the January, 2003 Users' Conference. This program, "Creating a VALE Virtual Catalog Using SiteSearch Open Source Software," was presented at the 2003 Users' Conference under the auspices of the VALE Resource Sharing Committee, chaired by Mary Mallery. The VVC allows users to search the online catalogs of multiple VALE libraries concurrently from a single interface. It is currently accessed through the VALE website ([www.valenj.org](http://www.valenj.org)) and is prominently displayed as part of the main blue navigation bar on the left side of all VALE web pages.

The screenshot shows the VALE new jersey website. The header includes the text "Dedicated to Innovation & Collaboration" and "VALE new jersey Virtual Academic Library Environment" with a green map of New Jersey. A search bar is located at the top left. The left navigation menu lists: VALE Home, Subscribed Databases, Reciprocal Borrowing, Virtual Catalog (circled in red), About VALE, VALE News, VALE Calendar, Annual Conference, and Contact VALE. The main content area features a "Spotlight on..." section with links to "Visions for VALE planning retreat: FINAL REPORT and papers", "VALE biennial FY2004/2005 report", and "New Jersey Knowledge Initiatives". The right sidebar contains "VALE news" with links to "Users conference proposals", "Visions for VALE Final Report now available", "NJKI usage statistics now available", and "NJKI Promotional Packets available", along with a "News archive..." link. Below that is the "VALE calendar" section with dates for "November 28: Executive Committee meeting" and "November 15: VALE Cooperative Collection Management Committee".

## Review: Hardware and Software Issues

The VVC system is hosted on the VALE server at Rutgers and maintained by Dave Hoover. The interface was constructed using OCLC SiteSearch Suite technology. SiteSearch includes 2 open source software programs that provide a comprehensive solution for managing distributed library information resources in a World Wide Web environment. WebZ™ is java-based Z39.50 client/server component used to create an interface to information resources. Database Builder provides the tools to build local databases in various record formats that can then be accessed through the WebZ interface [http://opensitesearch.sourceforge.net/docs/helpzone/main.html].

During the review process, the question of slow response time for displaying data result sets was addressed, which lead to the question of possible server inadequacy. Does the VVC system need to be housed on a newer/bigger server in order to produce faster result sets? Dave indicated that the power of the current server was more than adequate for the needs of the system. The primary problem lies with how the system “waits” for a response from each selected institution before it displays any results. The system relies on Z39.50 protocols to connect to the participating libraries’ online catalogs in order to retrieve search results. If one institution’s connection is slow or down, this could drastically affect the response time of the entire system.

## Review: Discovery, Immediate Fixes and Alternatives

As part of the review, the immediate solution was to remove those libraries with non-working connections from the VVC until the problem is resolved. In addition, a system check is run hourly

(during normal working hours) to monitor when existing libraries' connections are not working. While these changes did improve response time, they are only part of a permanent solution.

An alternative solution discussed was the elimination of the reliance on Z39.50 protocol. In this case, VALE member libraries would be asked to submit copies of their bibliographic records for inclusion in a master VALE database. The amount of work that would go into the creation and ongoing maintenance of such a system would be staggering. It would also be a bigger burden on participating libraries which would then be responsible for consistently supplying updated information to the system administrator. This solution is not recommended at this time.

### **Review: Functionality and Usability**

As part of this review, the VALE Website Committee met with Mary Mallery of the VALE Cooperative Collection Management Committee to discuss whether the VVC meets the needs and concerns of this particular committee. Concerns of this committee included lack of full participation in the VVC by VALE libraries, slow response time, and the lack of reporting capabilities. Desired reports included, but were not limited to:

1. Identify last copy
2. Identify rare materials
3. Identify strong collections
4. Identify items for digitization
5. Identify holdings overlaps
6. Identify out of print titles

Dave Hoover stated that based on existing VALE libraries participation or lack thereof it would be a significant undertaking for the VVC to generate the reports noted above. Ray Schwartz stated that trying to get definitive reports from a Z39.50 server is problematic. If the databases are not locally mounted, it is not impossible for Z39.50 technology to be able to give definitive results for the purposes of collection management. Issues as to the ability to connect to all servers over various networks will always be a problem. A single database with all the records from the VALE library catalogs, such as OCLC WorldCat, would be much better suited to those kinds of queries and reports. Mary Mallery recommended contacting another SiteSearch implementation (Colorado Virtual Library) that may be producing those kinds of reports. Ray Schwartz contacted CVL's system administrator Steve Wrede and he stated that the CVL is used extensively for searching and ILL and not for data collection or collection management.

The OCLC product, WorldCat Collection Analysis, has extensive reporting capabilities and may well serve the needs of the Cooperative Collection Management Committee. The committee has

previously requested funding from VALE so that all VALE libraries could participate in this program, but according to Anne Ciliberti, the VALE Executive Committee turned down this request because the cost was exorbitant.

**Review: Participating Libraries**

As of November 2006, of the total 52 VALE library sites the VVC has 27 working Z39.50 connections. There are 11 additional libraries which have non-functioning configurations. Many of the problems with these sites could be due to a change in information (e.g., new ILS or new server) since it was first provided, or firewall issues. Fourteen VALE libraries have not offered any configuration information. This may be due to the fact that some do not have Z39.50-compatible systems, or we simply do not have the proper contact information for that library. Ongoing maintenance of the Z39.50 connection information is a concern and would require updated contact information for each of the VALE libraries’ Systems Librarian (or similar position responsible for technical issues) as well as procedures for easily validating and updating configuration information on a timely basis. The committee recommends a spreadsheet of above mentioned information be gathered and made available for update as needed.

<b>November 2006 VVC Statistic</b>	
Total VALE libraries	52
Working libraries in VVC using Z39.50 connection	27
Non-functioning configuration libraries in VVC	11
Never configured libraries in VVC	14
VALE libraries participating in JerseyCat	29
VALE libraries participating in Open WorldCat	13

**Review: Other Available Services**

To further review the functionality of the VALE Virtual Catalog, the committee looked at the offerings of other available services – both free and fee-based systems.

1. **JerseyCat** - JerseyCat is a free service offered by the NJ State Library and includes interlibrary loan functionality but limited reporting capabilities. Approximately 29 VALE libraries participate in JerseyCat, which mainly consists of public and school libraries.

JerseyCat limits inclusion of holdings to those libraries willing to lend. Some academic libraries are concerned about becoming a predominant lender in such an environment. The VVC would not require participants to be lender. Should the VVC offer ILL capabilities? Would users complain about “yet another interface” to search for ILL materials? Would offering this service cause friction between VALE and the NJ State Library?

2. **Open WorldCat/WorldCat.org** - These two OCLC fee-based products offer users the ability to find local library materials by searching popular search engines such as Google and Yahoo! The limitation here is that all libraries may not have the required access to FirstSearch in order for their holdings to display in either of these products. This could be a financial hardship for many libraries. In addition, the desired reporting capabilities mentioned above are not available at this time.
3. **VALE Reciprocal Borrowing** - This program is a companion to the VVC. Its use would only increase with the availability of a complete catalog of VALE holdings. Right now, users need to search multiple library catalogs before finding the materials they need.

## **Recommendations**

The VALE Website Committee believes that a commitment to the VALE Virtual Catalog is warranted. The system is particularly useful for those libraries which do not currently have the ability to setup Z39.50 connections in their OPACs. Improvement of the VVC would also bolster participation in the VALE Reciprocal Borrowing program. Based upon our research and discussions, the VALE Website Committee makes the following recommendations regarding the VVC to the Executive Committee:

1. The Website Committee should move forward with a deeper analysis and revitalization of the system. Determine what specifically can be done to improve performance and functionality.
2. The VVC should be strongly marketed by the VALE Executive Committee to encourage participation by all VALE libraries (i.e. poster or breakout session at the annual conference).
3. A survey of member libraries should be conducted to determine current usage, desired functionality and future of VVC.
4. Determine whether interlibrary loan capabilities should be included in VVC.
5. Investigate the possible connecting/migration and/or replacement of VVC with OLS system already in discussion ... “prospect for a next generation library system that allow resource

sharing, enhanced capabilities, and simplified system architecture in a form of open source Integrated Library System.” Kurt Wagner’s meeting summary from the VALE OLS meeting on October 31<sup>st</sup>.

## Addendum 1 – List of VALE libraries in VVC, JerseyCat, and Open WorldCat

### VALE Virtual Catalog libraries

1. Atlantic Cape Community College
2. Bergen Community College
3. Burlington County College
4. Caldwell College
5. Camden County College
6. Centenary College
7. College of New Jersey
8. College of St Elizabeth
9. County College of Morris
10. Fairleigh Dickinson University
11. Georgian Court College
12. Kean University
13. Mercer County College
14. Monmouth University
15. Montclair State University
16. New Jersey City University
17. New Jersey Institute of Technology
18. New Jersey State Library
19. Ocean County College
20. Princeton Theological Seminary
21. Ramapo College
22. Richard Stockton College of New Jersey
23. Rider University
24. Rutgers University
25. Seton Hall University
26. University of Medicine and Dentistry
27. William Paterson University

### VALE libraries in JerseyCat

1. Bergen Comm Coll
2. Brookdale Comm Coll
3. Burlington County Coll
4. Caldwell Coll
5. Camden County Coll
6. Centenary Coll
7. College of New Jersey
8. College of St. Elizabeth
9. Cumberland County Coll
10. Drew U
11. Fairleigh Dickinson U
12. Felician Coll
13. Georgian Court
14. Gloucester County Coll
15. Mercer County Comm Coll
16. Middlesex County Coll
17. Monmouth U
18. Montclair State U
19. New Jersey State Library
20. Ocean County Coll
21. Passaic County Comm Coll
22. Raritan Valley Comm Coll
23. Rider U
24. Rowan U
25. Rutgers U
26. Salem Comm Coll
27. Seton Hall U
28. UMDNJ
29. William Paterson U

### VALE libraries in Open WorldCat

1. Bergen Comm Coll
2. Caldwell Coll
3. College of St. Elizabeth
4. Drew U
5. Mommouth U
6. Montclair State U
7. Princeton Theological Seminary
8. Princeton U
9. Richard Stockton Coll
10. Rowan U
11. Rutgers U
12. Stevens Institute

## **Addendum 2 – VALE VVC libraries NOT in JerseyCat and Open WorldCat**

### **VALE Virtual Catalog libraries NOT in JerseyCat**

1. Atlantic Cape Community College
2. County College of Morris
3. Kean University
4. New Jersey City University
5. New Jersey Institute of Technology
6. Princeton Theological Seminary
7. Ramapo College
8. Richard Stockton College of New Jersey

### **VALE Virtual Catalog libraries NOT in Open Worldcat**

1. Atlantic Cape Community College
2. Burlington County College
3. Camden County College
4. Centenary College
5. College of New Jersey
6. County College of Morris
7. Fairleigh Dickinson University
8. Georgian Court College
9. Kean University
10. Mercer County College
11. New Jersey City University
12. New Jersey Institute of Technology
13. New Jersey State Library
14. Ocean County College
15. Ramapo College
16. Rider University
17. Seton Hall University
18. University of Medicine and Dentistry

### **VALE Virtual Catalog libraries NOT in Open WorldCat or JerseyCat**

1. Atlantic Cape Community College
2. County College of Morris
3. Kean University
4. New Jersey City University
5. New Jersey Institute of Technology
6. Ramapo College

### **Addendum 3 – VALE Libraries NOT in VVC, JerseyCat or Open WorldCat**

1. Assumption College for Sisters
2. Berkeley College
3. Brookdale Community College
4. DeVry University
5. Essex County College
6. Gibbs College
7. Hudson Community College
8. Saint Peter's College
9. Somerset Christian College
10. Sussex County Community College
11. Thomas Edison State College
12. Union County College
13. Warren County Community College