How is circulation managed in Alma?

In developing Alma, Ex Libris has moved beyond the traditional ILS concept of circulation, to ensure fulfillment for end-users across a unified set of print, electronic and digital resources. This is much more than circulation, and it’s why we use the term “fulfillment” rather than circulation when describing the various patron services.

Alma’s Smart Fulfillment framework is a suite of functions that manage the delivery of resources to end users. It encompasses print circulation requesting and policies, electronic link resolution, and digital access and rights management. The focus of Smart Fulfillment is on maximizing the exposure of available resources and delivering options to end users in terms that matter to them, rather than according to the behind-the-scenes processing that library staff engages in to fulfill the request.

At the heart of user interaction with Alma is the Smart Fulfillment services menu. Working in conjunction with the discovery application, the services menu presents all options to patrons regardless of format. Taken together, the services menu greatly simplifies patrons’ experience of getting the resources they want.

- Alma responds to requests with a services menu that combines direct links to local digital or publisher-hosted electronic resources, physical resources available on the shelf, and requests that users may place on any resources.
- Options are filtered by patron rights—e.g., access restrictions on a digital resource will prevent patrons from seeing a link they can’t actually access.
- Services are arranged and presented according to library-defined rules—e.g., libraries may suppress the more expensive ILL option if the resource is available electronically.
- Link resolution is built into Alma as a core function of e-resource management; there is no need for a separate link resolver.

A key goal in Alma fulfillment is to simplify policy management. Simple library policies are clearer to library patrons, are simpler to administer and update, and are easier to analyze and tune to meet the library’s needs. All of these policy settings are determined by the library.

One of the core concepts in Alma fulfillment is the “Terms of Use” for library resources – regardless of format. The Terms of Use defines a bundle of individual rights, e.g. loan period, renewals, fine policies, etc. Once defined, the Terms of Use becomes reusable for many combinations of patrons and items.

This simple, yet flexible, approach allows institutions to focus on actual policies, rather than creating and maintaining matrices and complex collections.
Policy setting in Alma can be done for a wide variety of parameters, including loan rules, limits, calendar settings, and more. These policies can be enforced globally or at the branch level. An important concept in policy administration is the ability to inherit policy settings from higher locations in the organizational structure, such that global policies need to be defined only once, and become inherited by libraries and branches within the organization. Policies that are specific to lower levels in the organization are then locally defined and override the institutional settings.

For traditional functionality such as loans and returns, Alma focuses on creating clean interfaces that support staff work, as well as building out the self-service checkout via SIP2.

A configuration table in Alma allows for defining fines and fees related to various activities in the library – e.g., overdue fine, registration fee, notification fee, lost item charge, etc.

In addition, it is also possible to define if:

- a fine/fee can be waived;
- it can be created manually, or is automatically generated by the system;
- it can be refunded;
- the fine/fee is on the level of the library or the institution.

For example, loans are checked at the time of return to see if they are overdue. If a loan is found to be overdue, overdue policies are consulted to correctly calculate the fine. Fining policies may be set per days or hours and per open time or calendar dates. Fines may be controlled by a minimum and maximum fine policy. Also, grace time policies which allow additional time past an item's due date or time, may prevent creation of a fine even when an item is overdue.

Patrons can be charged fees for various types of activities, such as signing up for a course, extra education services, and so forth. Thus, many institutions handle patron-related charges in a dedicated bursar system. This can be the institution’s ERP system or a system that is in charge of patron-related finance. Institutions export fine and fee information from Alma to
the bursar system. Exported fines and fees are considered closed in Alma, since they are handled outside of the library’s scope.

In general, the export of fines and fees is handled using XML files that are placed by Alma at a predefined FTP location. These XML files can then be fetched by the bursar system. The workflow is illustrated in the diagram below:

To export fines and fees from Alma to a bursar system, an integration profile must be defined, and Alma includes templates for this. Additionally, institutions that have multiple bursar system can define a separate profile for each bursar system:

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### Does Alma support integration with self service systems?

For more detail see: [General - Integrations - Self Service](#)

Patrons can access their account information from self-service kiosks using the SIP2 protocol. Alma has been integrated with the self-service systems from vendors such as 3M, Bibliotheca, Envisionware, and Checkpoint. Alma supports intelligent self-service devices using the SIP2 protocol. This includes support for issues, returns, and renewals from RFID self-check machines.

Alma allows for the definition of any number of Self-Check Integration Profiles. The staff user is guided through a short wizard to define the parameters relevant for the Self Check unit.

Learn about Self-Check machines in the Integration with Self-Service Systems video: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z-q-mCc33Bo&hd=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z-q-mCc33Bo&hd=1)

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### Does Alma support RFID?

For more detail see: [Integrations - RFID](#)

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### Does Alma support floating collections?

Alma can track and manage the temporary assignment of ownership from one library to another (i.e., from its permanent location to a temporary one). When an item is registered at a temporary location, standard processes for managing temporarily shelved inventory are used. This includes:

- Reports for items that are due back to their permanent location
- Automatic requests being placed to re-shelve the items back to their permanent shelving locations.

The items at their registered locations use the fulfillment policies and rules of the new location while being marked as being permanently owned by the other library.

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### Is in-house usage registered in Alma?

In-house loans are recorded when an item is scanned but not checked out (a non-circulating item that is used by a patron,
then scanned and re-shelved by staff, for example). A typical workflow for in-house use stats include staff members scanning in books that have been found on tables but not checked out of the library or on loan. When staff members return an item that does not have a loan, Alma indicates as such:

Each time a return is made for the item that does not have a loan, an in-house use is registered:

It is also possible to retrieve the information pertaining to in-house use in Alma Analytics:
Checkout

What mechanisms are supported to scan or read material and patron identifiers into Alma?

Barcodes and RFID tags can be used to scan material and patron identifiers, using any reader that will output identifiers.

In addition, the staff user can type in the name or title of the patron. Alma will display a list of matches, and the appropriate line can be then be chosen.
What are the options for searching for a user record from the checkout screen?

Users can be searched by a number of criteria:

- All (criteria listed below)
- E-Mail
- Name
- First Name
- Middle Name
- Identifiers – you can define and use various identifiers (such as library card number, barcode(s) and other identifiers)
- Job Category
- Primary Identifier
- User general information

Users are instantly searched when typing in the first letters or other identifiers (e.g. barcode).
Are there any limitations on the type, length, and format of barcodes for items and patrons?

There are no limitations on the type, length, and format of barcodes for items and patron account numbers.

What information is available from the checkout screen?

The Patron services page include the following activities:

- **Viewing requests** – The Circulation Desk Operator/Manager can view a list of items requested by the patron
- **Loans** – Current loans with the options to renew loans, add/scan in further items,
- **Returns** – Returned loans of either the current session or all returns
- **Fees and fines** – The active balance is shown with the option to pay fines/fees (full, partial, item/case related)
- **Editing patron information** – The Circulation Desk Operator/Manager can make changes to patron general information.

When clicking a resource in the Patron services page the user is routed to the Loan Audit Trail that shows brief bibliographic details and the loan history (unless not anonymized). Clicking the item’s barcode allows to enter the item record that link to the holding and bibliographic record view. With a cataloguer’s role users can enter the Metadata editor to edit the bibliographic or holding record.

Does Alma record the date and time that an item was checked out?

The loan date can be seen on the patron services screen. Loan date and time can be seen on the loan history screen (from the Actions button on the line item):
Does the checkout screen display the patron's overdue items, fines, blocks etc.?

Loading a patron record shows the patron's warnings – such as overdue items, on hold shelf items and existing fees:

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Can due dates be manually overwritten when issuing an item?

From the Patron Management Service screen the operator can change the due date of an item by clicking on the Change Due Date button. The staff user may choose to change the due dates of one, all or selected loans by clicking on the selected check boxes. The due date can also be changed inline from the Actions (...) button:

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Can staff see a patron's fines and fees from the checkout screen?

From the user details the Fines & Fees tab provides a list of fines and current balance:
Can a list of a patron’s items out on loan be generated?

From the Manage Patron Services screen, there is the option to send an a number of reports (activity, requests) and receipts to the patron.

Checkin

What information is available to staff regarding a returned item?

When an Item is returned in Alma, the staff user is advised of the next step for this item, such as item has to be re-shelved to a certain location or placed on the hold shelf if it has been requested by another patron:

Staff are also able to view the loan and usage history of returned items.

Can returned items be back dated?

On the Manage Item Returns screen, the operator can change the due date of returning items, by clicking on the calendar.
icon on the ‘Override return date time’ box:

The staff user can then enter the relevant date in the dialog box:

In addition, there is functionality related to bulk changes of a loan date:

Changes can be made on the level of the library and the location. Staff are prompted to enter a ‘from’ and ‘to’ due date range, as well as the new due date for all items matching the data input.

Can return receipts be printed?

Return receipts can be sent to a specified patron for items returned to the circulation desk. These receipts can either be sent to a patron via their user preferred email, or can be sent to a configured circulation desk printer:

When circulation desks are configured in Alma, there is an option for the library to select the option “Creates Return Receipts”. When this option is selected, return receipts will be automatically printed at the circulation desk printer or sent to the user’s preferred email. Receipts can also be configured and customized by the institution.
How are transit items handled?

If an item is returned to a library which is not the owning library then the staff user returning the item will get a pop up window regarding the transit of the item to the owning library.

The workflow steps can be summarized as follows:

- The staff user gets a message that it needs to be transited
- A transit letter is printed
In the repository search the item appears as “in transit”

When the item is scanned in at the owning library it will appear as “in place”.

Can staff view a list of in transit items?

This can be seen from the Monitor Requests and Item Processes list. The list can be filtered by Process Type ‘In Transit’, and further filtered by Pickup Location. Many facets are available on this screen, allowing for the list to be further filtered (e.g. by request date):
Override Options

Can authorized staff override system blocks?

Override policies are configured by the library and only available to staff with the relevant roles and permissions. An example of the override configuration table can be seen in the following screen capture:

The following screen capture illustrates a library defined block that can be overridden by the staff operator:

The following example shows the same block that cannot be overridden by the staff operator who does not have override privileges:
Renewals

Can a single item, selected items, or all items checked out to a patron be renewed?

Staff members (with the appropriate role) may renew all or selected items from the Manage Patron Service screen from the staff interface:

Note that Alma allows renewal of a loan even after the original due date unless the Maximum Renewal Period has been reached for the loan. For example, if the original due date is 2019/7/27 23:59 and the maximum renewal period is until 2019/7/30 23:59, borrower can renew the due date until 2019/7/30 23:59

Are renewal parameters configurable by the library?

Alma’s “terms of use” (TOU) functionality ensures that different library policies come into play when users attempt to renew resources. An example of this can be seen in the following screen capture:

Policies related to elements such as Maximum Renewal Period can be configured by the library. A new policy can be defined at any time:
Does Alma support automatic renewals?

Alma supports manual and automatic loan renewals. Manual renewals are possible through self-check, staff users in Alma or in the Discovery layer by patrons.

Automatic loan renewal rules define the conditions under which items will be renewed by the Notifications - Send Courtesy Notices and Handle Loan Renewals job. Input parameters can be by user group and/or item owner (library). Any number of such rules may be defined.

The loan history link on the item (from the patron’s loan list) shows the automatic renewal of an item.

The Notifications - Send Courtesy Notices and Handle Loan Renewals job runs nightly at a defined time.

This job not only handles automatic renewals, it also sends out courtesy notices to users whose items are due shortly. The fulfillment jobs configuration defines these parameters:
Can staff see the current number of renewals for each item borrowed by the patron?

This can be seen on the Manage Patron Items screen from the Actions (...) button > Loan History:

![Loan Audit Trail](image)

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**Ad hoc item creation**

**How are temporary item records created?**

A staff user at the circulation desk, (with the relevant roles and privileges) can create a temporary item record:

![Create Item](image)

Clicking on the 'create item' link initiates a workflow for creating the item. Mandatory fields are marked:

![Item Information](image)

There are several options when creating the brief record:

- a. **Suppressing the record for publishing to Discovery**
- b. **Course Restricted** - Whether you want the item to be searchable in Discovery only within a Courses search scope (once you set up the appropriate Discovery search rules).
- c. You must define the location for the item
- d. You can define the loan policy that will apply (also in case an item is created for instant loan)
Alma will automatically assign a work order to the item, so that on its return it will be flagged for further processing. You can set up brief level rules to identify such records in the system (not only restricted to records that were created with quick cataloging but also records that were imported). Alma provides a dedicated job to retrieve such records for further processing (e.g. manual cataloging, normalization plus matching and merging with external resources, etc.)

Can items with no barcode or item record be loaned out?

Alma provides the possibility to search for an item directly in the repository from within a fulfillment activity, if the item is recorded with a barcode in Alma but the actual barcode label on the physical item itself is damaged or unreadable for the Circulation Desk staff.

In the Patron Services menu a staff user can enter the repository search through clicking the magnifying glass in the Scan item barcode field.

After submitting the search Alma staff can click on a record to choose from the queries result: The barcode of the chosen item will be registered in the loan box and the item can be loaned.

Self Check circulation

What options are available for self-check circulation?

Alma allows for the definition of any number of Self-Check Integration Profiles.

SIP2 Protocol
Alma supports communication over the SIP2 protocol, which is used primarily for communication with local self-service machines. The communication is bi-directional. Since the vast majority of the SIP-based systems were built and designed without the cloud in mind, the SIP2 protocol lacks several components in order to fully support a cloud-based SaaS – namely, a unique institution ID and secure communication channel (which is supported in SIP3). Once SIP3 becomes the de-facto standard with cloud capabilities, Ex Libris will support it as well.

Alma supports the following self-check actions:

- Check out item (and canceling checkout)
- Check in item (and canceling check-in)
- Renew item
- Renew all items
- Pay fees
- Patron information
- Item information
- Patron status
- Login (enables turning the self-check machine on and off)
- Prevent requested items check in

Status (verifies that there is communication between Alma and the self-check machine).
Offline circulation

Does Alma support offline circulation?

Alma includes an offline circulation tool that will allow for the continuation of check-in and check-out activities when the system is available. The offline circulation tool can be installed locally and allows the data to be synced back to Alma when the network connection is back following a network failure. In addition, as Alma is hosted in the cloud, in case of local network outage there is also the option of using 3G or 4G mobile networks to access the system, enabling normal operations.

The offline circulation utility can be downloaded from the [Developers Network](#).

How are transactions uploaded from the offline client back to Alma?

The offline circulation client stores patron barcodes and item barcodes. Loans are generated when the offline circulation files are uploaded to Alma.

To upload offline loans and returns, on the Offline Circulation List page click in the File Name field and select the .dat file containing the list of loans and returns performed during connection downtime.

Click Upload and Validate File Content.

The job is displayed in the table at the bottom of the page. Its status is displayed in the Status column.

![Offline Circulation List](#)

To view details of a job, click View for the relevant job. The Job Report page opens, detailing the number of items processed successfully and unsuccessfully.

![Job Report](#)

Total views:

10461