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## January 2009 V-smart: A New Web-based Library Automation System from Infor

### *Smart Libraries Newsletter*

*Smart Libraries Newsletter* delivers hard data and innovative insights about the world of library technology, every month.

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# Smart Libraries™

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## V-smart: A New Web-based Library Automation System from Infor

Infor Library and Information Solutions launched the general release of V-smart in November 2008. V-smart is a new, fully Web-based integrated library system. This product continues the evolution of the Vubis library automation system, advancing the product from the client/server architecture into the realm of Web-based computing, the preferred technology approach in the current technology environment. This release follows the testing and early adoption of the software in two French libraries, Sainte-Genève University and La Cité Internationale Universitaire de Paris. Infor indicates that at least ten additional libraries are preparing to move to V-smart.

Although Infor has a relatively small presence in the United States and Canada, it ranks as one of the major library automation providers in other regions. Its products are used most in The Netherlands, Belgium, France, and the United Kingdom. Infor continues the heritage of Geac, one of the major providers of library automation systems in North America, beginning with GLIS in the 1980's and with the PLUS and Advance ILS products in the 1990's. While the company's impact has diminished in the United States and Canada, it has continued as a major international player.

V-smart will take the reigns as the company's premier integrated library system, though support and development of Vubis Smart, which previously served as the company's strategic product, will continue. The company will focus its marketing efforts for new sales on V-smart rather than Vubis Smart. While Infor positions V-smart as its key product for the future, the transition will be gradual. With 360 installations of Vubis Smart worldwide representing over 1,000 individual libraries, the company has a strong interest in maintaining this product as it launches its next-generation ILS. Library automation companies face the important challenge of renewing and updating their products as required by inevitable changes in technology. These companies must keep their products up-to-date without producing a negative impact for the libraries committed to that product. If a company uses product strategies that allow libraries to move to new generation products within their own time frame, it will result in less disruption and produce the highest levels of retention. The Vubis software traces its roots back to the mid 1970's and has managed to reshape itself around several major technology paradigms through its history, steadily adding new features and functionality along the way.

### Advantages of a Web-based ILS

The transition of Infor's library automation product into a Web-based system falls well within the trends of current technology. Using current Web programming techniques it is possible to create fully functional interfaces, eliminating the need to install client software on the workstations. Client/server computing grew out of the need to distribute part of the workload away from overburdened centralized servers. The extraordinary computing power available today as well as the ability to cluster servers into infinitely

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scaleable platforms mitigates the need to offload computing onto client software. While client and server modularity may still need to be maintained internally, Web-based systems provide great flexibility and often result in lower operational costs.

Until recently, applications that involve complex, feature-rich interfaces tended to be implemented with full graphical clients created in environments like Microsoft Windows, the Macintosh OS, or with Java. These environments offer very rich and precise user interface controls that are needed in order to create efficient data entry and operational workflows. Web-based interfaces have advanced, especially through techniques such as Ajax, to the point where they can handle complex interfaces. One of the dominant trends in software development involves a preference for Web interfaces rather than graphical clients whenever possible.

One of the major advantages to this approach involves less effort for the support of the system. For products that require the installation of client software, the process of installing and configuring the software and regularly performing updates imposes a significant amount of work for IT personnel. Libraries that use a client/server ILS know that performing even a minor upgrade can require a major effort to coordinate the installation of the new software on all the computers throughout the library that access the system. Web-based systems eliminate this component of support, since it relies on the Web browser already present on any library workstation. This simplified support model especially appeals to libraries with branches or other facilities that might otherwise require IT staff to travel to perform installations or upgrades of client software. The Web-based approach of V-smart makes it much easier for a library to extend its system to additional libraries without a significant effort.

Libraries, like other organizations, allow or even encourage increasing num-

bers of staff to work remotely or telecommute. Installing ILS client software on home computers can not only impose challenges for IT support, but it may also involve the purchase of additional licenses. The use of a web-based ILS significantly simplifies support for remote workers.

As a Web-based system, V-smart will also be offered in a software-as-a-service (SaaS) model. This approach may especially appeal to smaller libraries that may not have the personnel needed to manage the server side of an ILS implementation. SaaS continues to grow as a trend in the library automation industry among smaller libraries.

Web-based systems are inherently platform independent, as opposed to client/server systems, which require the developer to produce separate versions for every type of computer supported. The client software for Vubis Smart was offered only for computers using the Microsoft Windows operating system. Library staff can operate V-smart using any type of computer that will support either Microsoft Internet Explorer or Mozilla Firefox. This allows, for example, the use of Macintosh or Linux computers.

Customizability is another advantage that Infor attributes to the Web-based approach of V-smart. The product relies on CSS (cascading style sheets) to control the presentation of the application to the user. The library can customize many aspects of the system through modification of the CSS files.

## V-smart vs. Vubis Smart

As Infor introduces V-smart, it's important to see it as a continuation of a well-established library automation system. This new version preserves the conceptual and functional approach of the product while making a transition from the software used by library personnel from graphical Window-based clients to operating the system through Web browsers.

The server software for V-smart runs on Microsoft Windows Server, Linux, or most flavors of Unix. All major modules and functionality of Vubis Smart are supported in V-smart, including circulation, cataloging, acquisitions and serials management. The Web OPAC for V-smart builds on what was created for Vubis Smart. User services available in the V-smart Web OPAC include placing reservations, setting alerts, and the ability to rate items in the library's collection.

V-smart includes a reporting module called SSP, or Select, Sort and Publish. This module includes standard reports typical of ILS products as well as the ability to produce customized reports that access any data managed within the system. SSP provides detailed access to data and statistics related to patrons, collections, and financial transactions.

Libraries can expect the same basic functionality between the new V-smart ILS and the well-established Vubis Smart, albeit with some inevitable differences. The initial release of V-smart has some new functionality that is not found in Vubis Smart. Most of these enhancements can be seen in the circulation module and the availability of a module to perform requests from closed stacks. Going forward, most new functionality will appear first in V-smart with later deployment in Vubis Smart. Infor intends to maintain fairly consistent functionality between the two products, though differences in architecture may dictate some limitations of the client/server version.

Due to the more advanced Web-based architecture, some new features planned for V-smart will not be possible to implement in Vubis Smart. Infor's role-based user management and the implementation of Web services, for instance, can not be implemented in Vubis Smart.

## Web Services

Many libraries require access to the data within their automation environment

beyond the interfaces provided as part of the system. Access to the internal databases allows the library more flexibility in generating reports about each aspect of the system and is needed to connect with other software applications employed by the library. Web services are the key technology for this programmatic access to internal data, providing a degree of openness that libraries increasingly demand.

Infor indicates that Web services and the service-oriented architecture are an important part of its technology strategy and have been implemented across its suite of library automation products.

Infor plans to deliver an additional set of Web services beginning with version 2.0 of V-smart, expected for release by summer 2009. The existing Web services already present in the initial 1.0 release of V-smart and already present in Vubis Smart provide programmatic access to the internal functionality. This new set of Web services will allow direct access to the system's core data to supplement the existing Web services and will be implemented only in V-smart. Access to the internal databases is also possible through the ODBC, or Open Database Connectivity, a standard approach for communicating with SQL compliant databases.

## Historical Development of Vubis

V-smart continues the long evolution of this family of integrated library systems. What began as a host/terminal system has prospered through several cycles of technology changes, with new versions of the product created for the era of graphical user interfaces, client/server architectures, and now Web-based computing.

The VUBIS automation system involves a technology evolution spanning over 30 years. Early versions of the product developed through a collabora-

tion between the Brussels Free University and Eindhoven Technical University. The University of Brussels began its initial development of VUBIS as early as 1974. In 1983 the Technical University of Eindhoven joined the development of VUBIS. In 1987 the two universities initiated a relationship with ODIS for development, support, and marketing of VUBIS.

(See: <http://w3.tue.nl/nl/diensten/bib/over/bibliotheek/bibliotheekgeschiedenis/vubis/> for more details regarding the history of VUBIS).

The original VUBIS system was a host/terminal based system created with the MUMPS programming language, a popular development environment during that period, later called "M". A company called InterSystems eventually became the dominant provider of this technology, eventually redeveloping it into Caché, often termed a post-relational database. Caché supports three different storage and access methods: object, relational, and direct. V-smart continues to rely on Caché as its internal database platform.

Geac Computer Corporation became involved with the VUBIS library automation system through its January 1995 acquisition of ODIS, which had divisions in The Netherlands, Belgium, and France. At the time of its acquisition VUBIS was installed in about 100 libraries.

Infor continues the legacy of Geac, one of the pioneers of the library automation industry. Geac entered the library automation industry offering the GLIS product that ran on the company's own proprietary hardware and operating system. The original GLIS 8000 was superseded by the GLIS 9000. As proprietary systems became less common, the company moved into the open systems arena through the acquisition of the Unix-based Advance automation system and later the LIBS100PLUS it acquired from CLSI, which it renamed PLUS. Both

PLUS and Advance are now considered legacy systems with an ever-diminishing number of libraries. Today, Infor Library and Information Systems focus their ILS strategy exclusively on library automation products surrounding Vubis. The company also offers a full suite of other library automation products including the V-spaces federated search, V-sources for electronic resource management, V-Link for OpenURL link resolution, and V-insight for statistical analysis.

Geac continued the development of VUBIS, advancing the product from the host/terminal model to the client/server architecture. Geac released Vubis 4 Windows in the late 1990's. The product offered a Windows-based graphical user interface instead of the text-based terminal menus. In 2001, the company introduced Vubis Smart, moving the product into the client/server arena.

In November 2006 Geac was acquired by Golden Gate Capital, a large private equity firm. The company was originally placed within a subsidiary called Extensity, but within a few months became part of Infor, another company in the Golden Gate portfolio. Under Infor, the Library and Information Solutions division has prospered, even though it represents a very small business unit relative to the size of the overall company.

In recent years Vubis Smart has seen reasonably strong sales, even in difficult markets such as the United Kingdom where the number of opportunities is very limited. The development of V-smart enables Infor to take its strategic product line through this current technology cycle where Web-based computing is dominant.

—*Marshall Breeding*