

Today & tomorrow:
*A brief history (& future) of
library systems in the 2020's*

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A brief history (& future) of library systems in the 2020's

- A brief history of library systems
 - Noting the recent history of market consolidation
- Current state of library systems
 - The rise of SaaS
 - Implications on system choice
- The promises (& pitfalls) of open source
 - Theoretical implications for libraries

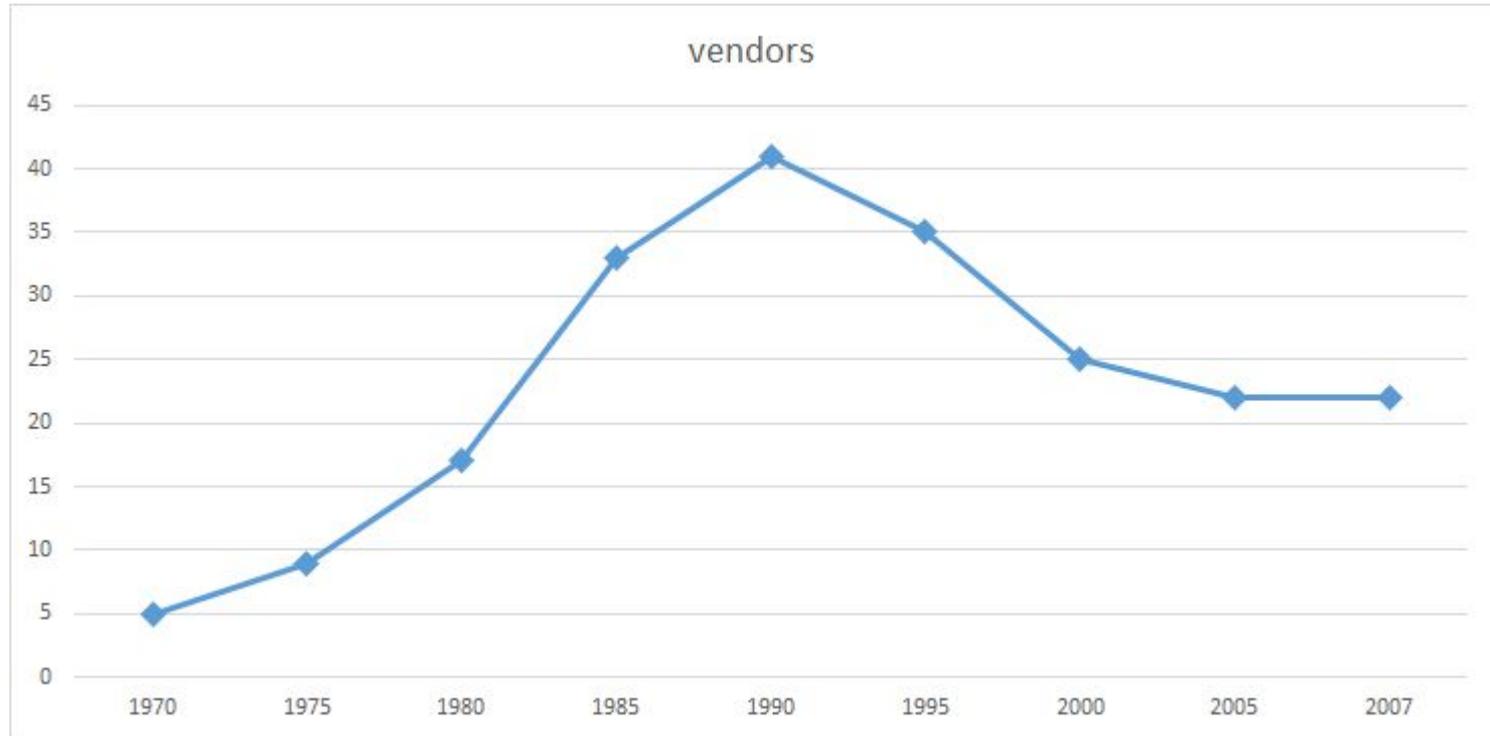
Some contextualizing thoughts

- Library systems exist in an administrative interzone that contains both patron/institutional needs & vendor/developer *decisions*<?>
- Our selection and implementation of library systems have implications for institutional workflows and impact how information is presented & delivered to users
- Systems, the vendors/developers that create them, and the institutions that use them are not neutral entities
- I am a higher education librarian, YMMV

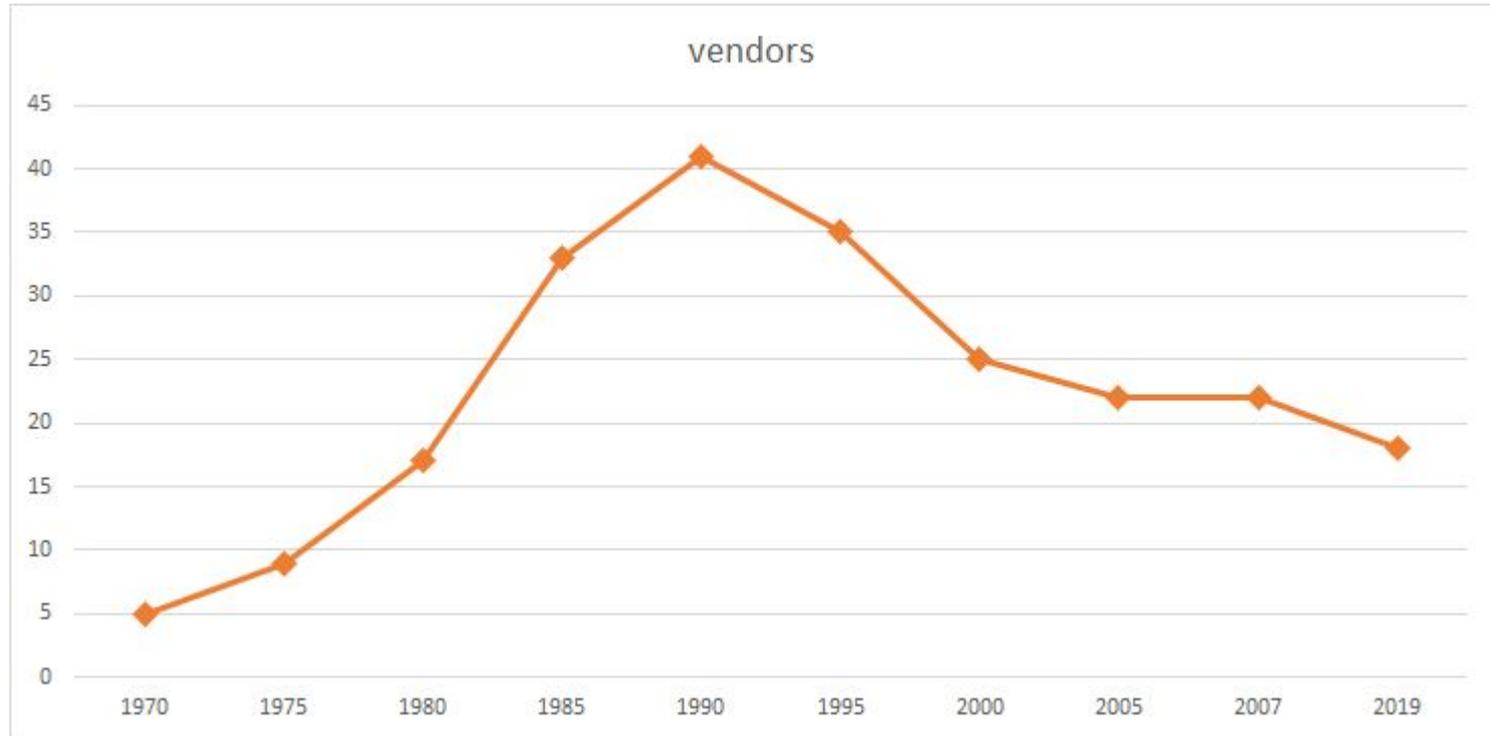
A brief history of library systems

- Initially developed in 1960's / 1970's
- Boutique applications, mainframe dependency
- Highly refined by 1990's
 - MARC support
 - OPAC support
- Market shifts in 1990's and beyond due to consolidation, changes in library ecosystem, applications refocus

The arc of the market



The arc of the market



Drivers of consolidation

- Vertical and Horizontal Consolidation -- Breeding
- Resist new entrants [or] advancement of regional companies...
uncomfortably narrow...
-- Breeding
- Move to Library Management Systems (LMS)
- Software-as-a-service (SaaS)

Is this good? Is this bad?

- Decreased institutional investment
- Quicker integration of enhancements
- Presumption of module interoperability

Is this good? Is this bad?

- Less direct control; Widening gap between system users and system governance
 - Vendor paternalism -- Askey & Askey
- Potential to introduce system errors & biases
 - Matthew Reidsma
 - Safiya Noble “Algorithms of Oppression”
 - Frank Pasquale “Black Box Society: The secret algorithms that control money and information”
- Does SaaS align with our professional values?
 - “When we look to Silicon Valley to explain the future of libraries, we give up our ability to actively shape it ourselves”

Open source



Why open source?

- Designed for libraries by libraries
- Creates opportunities for unmediated, organic growth of system design based on institution-specific or domain-specific needs
- Places systems within reach of institutions that might not otherwise be able to afford it
- “Non-excludable public good” - Eghbal
- Accountability
- “Warm fuzzy factor”

Why (maybe) not open source?

- Dramatically increased need for in-house expertise & infrastructural investment
- Free like a puppy, not free like beer
- True value realized not just in implementing, but in contributing
- Which raises questions...

Open source for whom?

- The economics of open source may be less equitable than its ethics
- Major contributors can become limited to a few large key players and corporate sponsors
- “Full Stack Librarians” and hyperfocus on technosolutionism - Mirza & Seale
- Systems reflect people and organizations with the privilege to build them - Kate Dohe

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What is the future for library systems?

- Consolidated market & SaaS models likely here to stay
 - And possibly continue
- Altered power dynamics between users & vendors
- Decisions between vendor-supplied and open-source solutions driven as much by economic exigencies as professional & ethical values
- Intentional approach of using open source to build community, not merely replicating corporate values in higher ed. / cultural heritage arena

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