



How West Des Moines Public Library reimagined the patron experience with Polaris and Vega LX

A launch with a longer horizon

For public libraries, delivering a simple patron experience often requires a great deal of work behind the scenes. Staff are balancing growing collections, changing community needs, digital resources, programming, communications and day-to-day service across multiple tools. Patrons, meanwhile, bring the expectations they have from the platforms they use every day. They want to search easily, manage their accounts without confusion and move between formats, branches and devices without the experience feeling fragmented.

System migration can feel much more than a technical project. When done well, it gives a library the chance to pause, look closely at how work really happens and decide what kind of experience it wants to create. It also asks a lot of people. Staff must learn new workflows, patrons need clear guidance and the organization must keep serving the community while preparing for change.

West Des Moines Public Library (WDMPL) approached its move from Sierra to Polaris with that kind of care. The team was not trying to simply rebuild the old environment in a new system. Instead, they saw the migration as a chance to rethink how staff worked, how patrons discovered resources and how the library could create a more connected experience across its services.

Rather than treating the change as a backend switch, WDMPL made it visible, approachable and even fun. A space-themed campaign helped introduce patrons to Vega Discover while giving staff a shared language for the transition. It acknowledged that everyone was learning together, and it turned a major operational change into a community project.

At the center of the new environment is Polaris, supporting core operations such as circulation, cataloging and patron account management. Around it, WDMPL is building on the Vega LX ecosystem, including Vega Discover, Vega Mobile, and Vega Promote to support more intuitive discovery, expand self-service options and create a foundation for continued improvement. Their story shows how a migration can become a turning point when technology decisions are guided by people, process and a clear vision for what comes next.

About West Des Moines Public Library

Located in one of Iowa's fastest-growing communities, WDMPL serves nearly 70,000 residents with

a collection of more than 190,000 items. The library had used Sierra for more than a decade, and staff knew all about their system, their workflows and the ways they had adapted over time to meet local needs. But as the community grew and expectations changed, the library began looking at what its next chapter should look like.

The decision to select Polaris together with Vega Discover, Vega Mobile, and Vega Promote was part of a broader roadmap. With Vega Program planned as the next phase, West Des Moines was not only choosing a new integrated library system. It was building toward a more connected library experience for staff and patrons.

Looking beyond a system migration

The library recognized that the way people discover, access and use library services had changed. Patrons were bringing new expectations to the catalog, and staff were looking for workflows that felt easier to learn, easier to explain and easier to sustain over time. That made the migration an opportunity to ask bigger questions. What should be easier for staff?

Where were patrons most likely to feel friction? Which processes had been preserved because they were familiar, and which ones could be redesigned because the library now had better tools? Those questions helped shift the project from a replacement effort to a modernization effort.

Building for the future, not recreating the past

One of the most important choices WDMPL made was to avoid recreating every existing workflow by default. The implementation team used the migration to rebuild processes from the ground up, looking at how work should happen in the future rather than simply translating old habits into a new interface.

That approach required structure. A dedicated SharePoint hub gave staff a central place to find information, track progress and stay aligned. Testing, implementation workshops and close collaboration with the Clarivate team helped the library make practical decisions while keeping the broader goal in view: creating an environment that matched how the library wanted to operate, not just how it had operated before.



Making change easier for everyone

Because the migration touched both staff routines and patron habits, WDMPL treated change management as part of the work, not an add-on. Staff training and change management sessions helped people understand not only what was changing, but why it mattered.

The team worked on making the transition feel less intimidating and more shared. The space-themed campaign brought that spirit to the public launch. Scavenger hunts, launch activities and playful messaging gave patrons a reason to explore their new catalog, while also giving staff a way to talk openly about the learning curve. The library invited the community into the transition, which made it easier for everyone involved.

Empowering every staff member

In many libraries, deep system knowledge can become concentrated among a small number of experts.

That can make day-to-day work more fragile, especially when staff are busy, roles shift or questions need quick answers.

With Polaris, WDMPL found an opportunity to distribute that confidence more widely. More intuitive workflows helped staff learn tasks more quickly and become more self-sufficient across departments. Stronger staff experience often shows up directly in the patron experience: questions are answered faster, processes feel smoother and service becomes less dependent on finding the one person who knows the workaround.

Helping patrons discover more

For patrons, one of the most visible changes was the discovery experience. Vega Discover helped make parts of the collection that could be difficult to browse in a traditional catalog feel more approachable. Collections such as the Library of Things and Learning Kits could be presented with richer visual displays, clearer navigation and a more inviting path to exploration.

That shift reflects a larger goal: helping patrons discover more of what the library already offers. When search feels easier and results are easier to understand, patrons are more likely to browse beyond the item they originally had in mind. Discovery becomes less transactional and more connected to the full value of the library's collections and services.

A partnership beyond implementation

The relationship between WDMPL and Clarivate did not end at launch. As the library continued to settle into the new environment, collaboration with implementation, customer success and product teams remained important. The library brought forward practical feedback from real staff and patron experiences, helping shape improvements that could benefit both WDMPL and the broader library community.

That ongoing dialogue also reflects the way modern library technology evolves. The most successful implementations are not static. They create a foundation that can respond to new needs, new ideas and new possibilities as libraries continue to change.





pictured: Traci Glass, Library Director, dressed as an astronaut to mark the launch of their new discovery layer

Looking ahead

For West Des Moines Public Library, implementation was not the finish line. It was the beginning of a more intentional way of thinking about library technology. The team continues to evaluate capabilities across the Polaris and Vega LX ecosystem, including future use of Vega Program to make services easier to manage, easier to discover and more connected for the community.

That is what makes the story compelling. WDMPL did not frame modernization as a single launch date or a checklist of features. It used the migration as a moment to build confidence, invite patrons into the change and create a platform for continuous improvement.

What other libraries can learn from West Des Moines Public Library

- Modernization works best when it is treated as a people-centered change, not only a technology upgrade.
- A migration can be a valuable opportunity to redesign workflows instead of carrying forward every legacy process.
- Staff confidence is a key measure of success because it directly influences the quality and consistency of patron service.
- A thoughtful public launch can make change feel approachable, helping patrons understand, explore and adopt new tools.

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