SWAN – Who We Are

SWAN is an organization of member libraries participating in an integrated library system (ILS) with the mission to improve services for Member Libraries by sharing resources, technology and a planned process of individual and collective growth. SWAN’s vision is that SWAN will set the standard of excellence as a library technology consortium. SWAN works to focus consortium resources on shared strategic initiatives while building upon a tradition of excellence and dedicated service.

As an organization SWAN values:
• Collaboration
• Cooperation
• Commitment
• Innovation
• Reliability

Currently SWAN’s strategic initiatives are to:
• Provide excellent customer service,
• Optimize work effectiveness,
• Formalize SWAN action/decision making process,
• Foster a collaborative and cooperative consortium culture,
• Create operational excellence/product leadership,
• Diversify and grow.

The Business We Are In
At its core, SWAN provides for the automating of library tasks, including but not limited to a shared online catalog, circulation activities, interlibrary loan, patron file maintenance, library materials acquisition and serials control. To achieve this, Member Libraries jointly finance an ILS for the automation of library functions with the staff and equipment required to manage and run the system.

Target Market and Industry
SWAN’s market is, simply put, libraries. Public, school, academic and special libraries may belong to the consortium and enjoy the benefits of resource sharing as well as the efficiencies of an automated system. Adding libraries to the consortium provides an increasingly diverse and strong set of resources for patrons and helps to ensure financial stability and potential for SWAN. Some libraries choose to be stand-alone operations, and there are several other ILS systems in Illinois, but there is recognition within the state that supporting and growing ILS systems is beneficial to the residents of Illinois.

Detailed Description of Business
With more than 1.2 million titles and 7.2 million items, SWAN is one of the largest systems in the world and is an invaluable resource not just to its members but also nationally and internationally. There is a strong commitment to resource sharing and successful reciprocal borrowing and interlibrary loan programs. The database has more than 1.2 million registered patrons and the system manages almost 11.8 million circulation transactions annually.
Technology has provided the opportunity for innovation within SWAN by enhancing services and enabling many patron-centered self-service features. Some of those features include book cover images, contents and reviews of materials, the patron account management, personal reading lists, and patron-placed holds and renewals. Patrons are also able to share recommendation information with each other by rating materials. The consortium has installed a search interface (Encore) that leverages Web 2.0 technologies by allowing users to access multiple resources with one simple search. In addition, the membership has added options for patron self-registration, digital signatures, and digital patron photos.

History
SWAN was formed in 1974 when staff from nine public libraries located in the south suburban Chicago area formed the System Wide Automation Network (SWAN) consortium. Currently, 78 libraries (including 70 public libraries, 3 community college libraries, and 2 special libraries) make up the consortium. SWAN recently became an intergovernmental instrumentality (September 2010). Previously, the Metropolitan Library System had been the legally recognized agent for SWAN.

Strengths and Core Competencies
A key component to the consortium is member cooperation. By sharing the cost of central site equipment, computer and database maintenance staff, and telecommunications, libraries of all sizes and types have realized the advantages of automated resource sharing and found it possible to offer their patrons the best in resource sharing. The common patron database provides for efficient and quick interlibrary loans. In addition, libraries who could normally not afford to offer their patrons the best and newest in technology in an online catalog are able to do so through their membership in SWAN. The original commitment to providing enhanced and effective services has guided SWAN members through their shared history. That libraries of all types and sizes have worked together for thirty-four years is proof of this commitment. Within the consortium, each member library has retained its own identity, but each has stayed committed to working toward a common vision of enhanced customer service and operational excellence. Through the ILS, SWAN member libraries serve their communities better and faster, clearly proving to be the taxpayer’s best available return on investment.

Importantly, reliability has been the top priority for SWAN. The SWAN staff work very closely with the members to ensure limited downtime (the average amount of downtime is less than 1% of available uptime) and a high quality, authoritative database. A history of strategic initiatives plus a tradition of excellence and commitment has made SWAN a consortium known around the world for cooperation and collaboration plus service, stability and innovation.

Challenges
There are several challenges facing SWAN. The first is economic. SWAN has always received a portion of financial support from the Metropolitan Library System. With state funding of systems in jeopardy, SWAN members may need to fully support SWAN. This will require study of SWAN services and potential changes in operations and services. The second challenge is the capacity of the current ILS software in relation to adding new members, expanding functionality, and providing consistent levels of service despite a wide range of old and new technology in operation in the member libraries. The third challenge is continuous evaluation of new technology, determining its value to SWAN and its operations.