

This year, Missouri Evergreen celebrates its tenth anniversary. For regular public library users, it's the biggest thing to happen to Missouri libraries in decades—even though its behind-the-scenes nature has kept it hidden to most people.

Missouri Evergreen Consortium began in 2011, when the Missouri State Library proposed a plan to establish a statewide network that would allow public libraries to seamlessly share their books, audiobooks, music CDs, and DVD movies with other libraries. Because traditional interlibrary loan methods were slow and labor-intensive, a new model for resource sharing was needed.

Missouri Evergreen was conceived as a group of libraries sharing a single catalog. Library patrons could find and choose the things they wanted, with prompt delivery to their home library, even if the particular item they wanted was in a library collection on the other side of the state. An integrated library system, or ILS, allowed patrons to search and select materials from libraries across the state, and place requests from any computer, at home or at the library, quickly and easily. The statewide courier delivery service would then transport the item to the patron's library, often within a few days.

A committee of library directors was appointed to select an ILS for the new consortium. They chose a platform called Evergreen, an open-source software used by hundreds of libraries in the U.S. and internationally. It's free to download and install, and libraries partner with other organizations to help maintain and improve the ILS and keep it state-of-the-art. The new resource-sharing consortium was named Missouri Evergreen.

On July 1, 2012, Poplar Bluff Municipal Library was the first member to join Missouri Evergreen. Ten other libraries joined Missouri Evergreen in the next year. Over the next ten years, membership grew to include 60 Missouri public libraries, all sharing the same ILS and freely exchanging materials to benefit their patrons. Library users at these libraries can borrow from a collection of 4 million items with a simple click of a button. Missouri Evergreen's combined collection is larger than any other single library collection in the state.

In addition to allowing libraries to easily share their materials, Missouri Evergreen provides smaller libraries an affordable, customer-friendly ILS with modern convenience features like text notifications and reading history; there is even a free mobile app, which allows patrons to search the online catalog, place requests, and check their accounts from their laptops, phones, or other personal devices.

Missouri Evergreen's future is bright. Every public library in Missouri is eligible to join Missouri Evergreen. Over 40% of Missouri's public libraries are currently members, with plans to grow that number to 95% in the coming years. The State Library continues to provide Missouri Evergreen with federal grant funds to keep membership costs low for participating libraries.

The consortium currently includes public libraries of all sizes, from Scenic Regional Library with over 140,000 residents, to Albany Carnegie Library, serving fewer than 1,700, and growing each year. Library users can encourage their local library to join Missouri Evergreen. It's an easy and affordable way for even the smallest library to gain access to a vast number of items from across the state.