

Case Study

The integration of **Aspen Discovery** and **The Palace Project** brings a unique and powerful ebook and audiobook content solution to libraries and their patrons.

» BACKGROUND

Libraries provide a diverse range of digital resources to their communities, including ebooks, audiobooks, streaming media, and other digital formats. As demand for these resources grows, so do the expectations for fast, seamless, and user-friendly access. Meeting these expectations requires constant innovation in library systems to keep pace with the rapidly evolving marketplace for digital content and consumer technology.

The Palace Project and **Aspen Discovery** addressed these challenges by integrating their platforms through the **Open Publication Distribution System (OPDS)**. This community-supported, non-proprietary standard enables automated metadata exchange and secure content access between systems. OPDS provides a consistent, modern, and vendor-neutral framework that reduces integration costs, minimizes librarian workload, and supports seamless discovery and delivery of digital content.

By leveraging a shared open standard, these two open-source platforms deliver a powerful, scalable solution for libraries. The integration empowers librarians to expand content offerings, streamline workflows, and enhance the patron experience—all without the expense and complexity of custom, one-off integrations.

» INTRODUCTION

Aspen Discovery is an open-source library discovery and patron engagement platform designed for diverse, multi-type, and multi-site library consortia. It offers a unified search experience across physical

and digital collections, while giving libraries the flexibility to customize websites and patron engagement tools. Backed by a vibrant community and supported by partners such as **Grove for Libraries**, **ByWater Solutions**, and **Equinox**, Aspen is a sustainable, community-driven alternative to proprietary discovery systems.

LYRASIS. Lyris is a non-profit 401(3c) that empowers libraries, archives, and museums through content services, open technologies, and community-based solutions that expand access to information, preserve cultural heritage, and advance the shared goals of our members and the communities we serve. Collaboratively, we build a future that is inclusive, equitable, accessible, and sustainable. Its Ebooks and Community Engagement Division develops and hosts **The Palace Project**—a mobile reading platform that consolidates multiple e-content services and publishers into a single, intuitive app. Supporting formats such as EPUB, PDF, and multiple audiobook types—along with their associated DRM requirements—Palace enables patrons to browse, borrow, and enjoy diverse digital materials without juggling multiple apps, accounts, or interfaces.

The integration of Aspen Discovery and The Palace Project through OPDS offers libraries a much-needed solution for delivering a consistent, high-quality digital experience. It opens the door to a broader marketplace of digital content services, frees libraries from reliance on a limited set of “legacy” integrations, and ensures that patrons can seamlessly discover and access resources from both established and emerging providers.

» CHALLENGE

Libraries face significant obstacles when adding new content sources to their discovery and access systems:

- **Complex onboarding process** » New content requires collecting MARC records from multiple providers, then editing or importing them into the Integrated Library System (ILS).

- **Limited platform support »** Even with Library Service Platforms (LSPs) extending ILS functionality, many external content sources fall outside these ecosystems.
- **Patron experience gaps »** Unintegrated content leads to inconsistent discovery, broken access points, and a fragmented user journey.
- **API dependency risks »** Proprietary, inconsistent, and evolving APIs increase the likelihood of service disruptions and higher maintenance burdens.
- **Staff workflow strain »** Librarians must manage ongoing manual metadata processing and troubleshoot integration issues.
- **Escalating costs »** Service providers incur ongoing expenses to maintain multiple bespoke integrations, especially when APIs change or fail.

For Aspen Discovery and The Palace Project, these challenges are magnified by their broad range of integrations. Maintaining compatibility across numerous ILS platforms, content providers, and evolving API endpoints requires continuous support, development resources, and coordination—draining capacity that could be used for innovation.

» STRATEGY

As open-source initiatives, both Aspen Discovery and The Palace Project embraced a collaborative, community-driven approach to solving shared industry challenges. When the two organizations partnered to integrate The Palace Project into Aspen Discovery, Aspen's lead architect, Mark Noble, agreed to adopt the Open Publication Distribution System (OPDS)—an open, community-managed specification already in use by Palace's servers to deliver content to its mobile apps and to integrate materials from multiple content providers.

This standards-based approach offered distinct advantages over a bespoke API. By relying on OPDS, each organization could independently design, build, and scale its platform without requiring tight coordination or synchronized engineering schedules. For Aspen Discovery, the OPDS Connector was developed to not only enable seamless integration with Palace but also extend to any content providers already connected to Palace, making future integrations simpler for Aspen and its library community. For The Palace Project, it leveraged existing protocol support, community documentation, and institutional expertise, avoiding the need for substantial developer time, dedicated project management, or disruptive architectural changes.

The result was a mutually beneficial integration that preserved each platform's technical autonomy, streamlined development, and reinforced the value of open standards in fostering interoperability across the library technology ecosystem.

» IMPLEMENTATION

The integration began with a clear plan: identify key goals, review potential implementation options, and compile relevant OPDS specification references. Each organization then set up a dedicated test library and collection within its own environment, allowing teams to work independently and manage their timelines without interfering with each other's systems.

For communication, the teams established a dedicated Slack channel to share updates, post questions, and schedule check-ins as needed. Once the integration work was completed, each organization conducted its testing and engaged select clients in pilot programs. Feedback from these pilots informed final adjustments before broader rollout.

» RESULTS AND OUTCOME

Clients' library systems saw significant growth in Palace App usage, driven by increased visibility of unique content, expanded availability, and the ease of reading offered by The Palace Project apps for both new and existing collections. For Aspen, the integration reinforced its role as the central discovery layer for all a library's content, while strengthening its position as a tool for consolidating user engagement within library-branded platforms. As a result, libraries could deliver a more seamless experience for patrons searching, borrowing, and reading digital content.

» TESTIMONIALS

"By integrating through the open OPDS standard, Aspen Discovery and The Palace Project give libraries a powerful way to expand digital collections, streamline workflows, and deliver a seamless patron experience — without costly custom integrations or added librarian workload."

James English

Director Business Development, Lyrasis

"This integration shows what's possible when open-source platforms work together using open standards. By adopting OPDS, Aspen Discovery and The Palace Project delivered a seamless solution that expands digital access for patrons while reducing complexity for libraries. It's a clear example of how collaboration and shared protocols can move the entire library ecosystem forward."

Mark Noble

Lead Architect for Aspen Discovery and Co-Founder of Grove for Libraries

» CONCLUSION

The integration of Aspen Discovery and The Palace Project through the OPDS standard demonstrates the power of open-source collaboration and shared protocols in solving complex challenges for libraries. By adopting a common, non-proprietary framework, both platforms preserved their independence while creating a unified, scalable solution for seamless digital discovery and access.

For libraries, the result is more than just a technical achievement—it's a practical, sustainable pathway to expanding digital collections, reducing integration costs, and delivering a consistent, intuitive patron experience. For the broader library technology community, it stands as a proof of concept for how open standards can drive innovation, improve interoperability, and lower barriers to entry for new content providers.

This collaboration is not simply an endpoint, but a foundation. As digital content formats, distribution models, and patron expectations continue to evolve, the OPDS-driven integration between Aspen Discovery and The Palace Project offers a flexible framework for future growth—ensuring that libraries can continue to meet their communities' needs with agility, efficiency, and impact.