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CUSTOMER SPOTLIGHT:

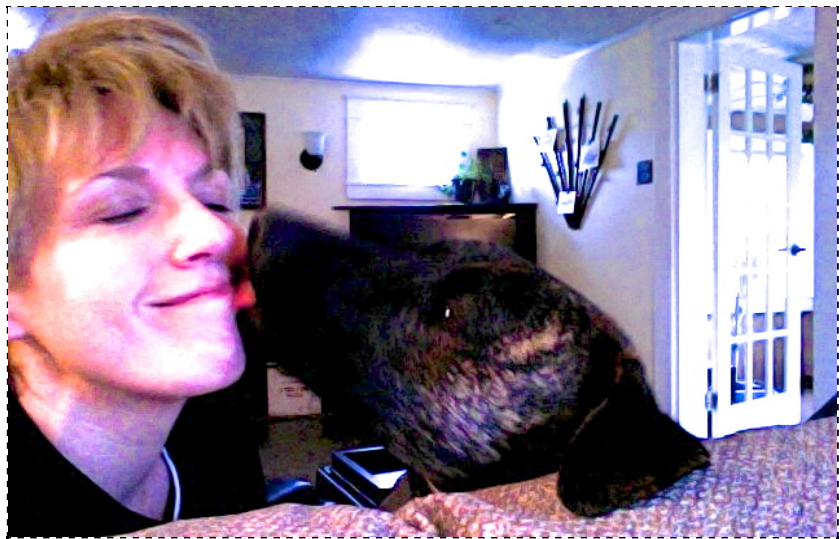# Laurie Egan, OCM BOCES Library System (Syracuse, NY)

Last May, Laurie Egan boarded her first flight in a decade.

As a systems consultant for the OCM BOCES School Library System in Syracuse, NY, Laurie faced down her fear of flying to visit the Mandarin offices in Boca Raton, FL. There, she met with Jonathan Edwards and Alex Ratmiroff with our Quality Assurance (QA) team from 8:30-5:30 every day for a week. By the end of the week, Laurie left behind a several-page document with screen shots and a list of fixes and new features that she hoped to see in the Oasis product used by 51 public schools in her district.

Laurie Egan with her dog Beowulf; "Another reason why kids should read, so they don't just name their dog 'Spot'"

"Software needs feedback from clients," Laurie says. "Unfortunately, for most people, if they're unhappy about something, they don't try to do anything constructive. I look at places where software could be more efficient. I want the system to do everything for librarians except maybe make coffee (though it'd be nice if it could do that too), but if it doesn't do something that librarians need, I go to Mandarin: 'How can we do this?' That's also why I like working with a smaller company; it may take a little while to get things done, but they listen and respond to feedback."

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Comments and Ratings

Make your OPAC more valuable for everyone! Encourage your patrons to interact with your OPAC by rating and commenting on their reads. Ask students to write reviews of their favorite books or videos. Provide one more way to bring your community together in the library.

When the Ratings and Comments feature is turned on for your OPAC*, you will see a Comments link and a figure with five books for the items in your search results. The feature requires an ISBN, so the link will only display for records with an ISBN.

Any patron can click on the Comments link and give the item a rating between one and five. She or he can also see how many others have rated the item and at what level.

To be able to add a comment, patrons must be in a Patron Group that allows access to this feature, and they must have a login and password in their patron records.

When a patron posts a comment, an email is immediately sent to the librarian, showing the comment and when and by whom it was entered. Until the librarian logs in and edits the comment, it displays only as "NEEDS REVIEW". The librarian can decide how much of the patron's name to display with the comment.

*To enable this feature, log in to Customer Corner at http://www.mlasolutions.com, click on the Utilities link on the right side and scroll down to find the directions and the link for the required table file. If this is too technical or your library technical staff is not available, please contact Mandarin Tech Support at 800-426-7477 or support@mlasolutions.com.
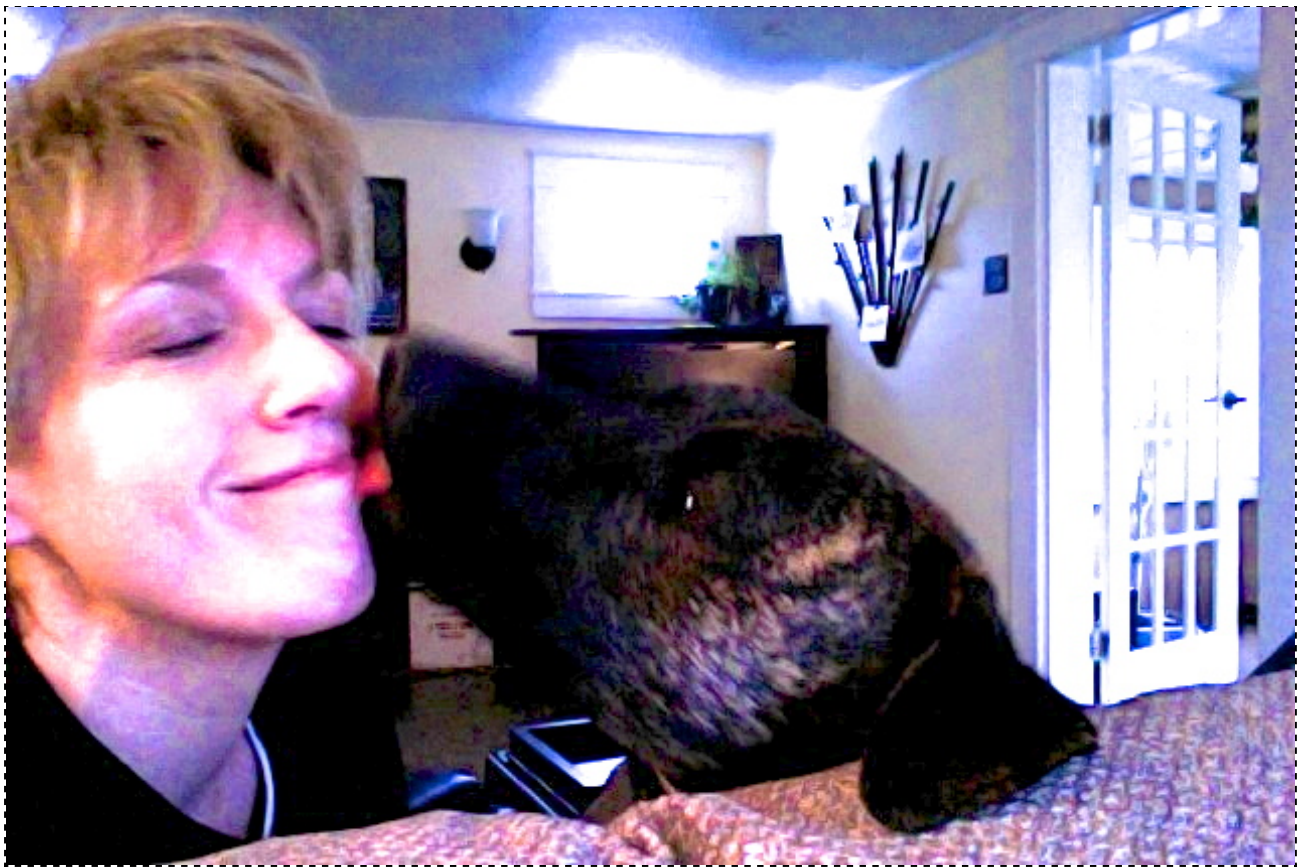
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Laurie's role as a technical consultant enables her to relay those nettlesome inefficiencies from librarians to Mandarin's QA. But anyone who uses any software has ideas about how it can be more efficient, or ideas for additional features they wish it had. That is exactly what Mandarin's QA team is there for: to work with you to tailor our products to your needs.

Laurie's background in databases -- with a BS in Computer Information Management Systems -- also allows her to see the library catalog differently.

"Most librarians see the catalog as a place to list books, DVDs, et cetera," Laurie says. "I came with a different viewpoint. A catalog is not limited to that; really, it's just a big database, it can hold anything. Even if something doesn't formally contain a bibliographic record, you can create one. Librarians look at the catalog in a traditional sense, at least initially. But we can use the catalog to link to different technologies, post different kinds of content. The fields are already there to accommodate it ."

For example, Laurie has helped her librarians use the "Visual Search" function in Mandarin Oasis to link students to various online tools and resources. Take a look at the "Visual

Search" set up for McNamara Elementary School here, or see the screen shots below. Clicking the button for "Homework Helper Tools" in the lower-left brings students to a list of buttons for outside resources like calculators and copyright guides.
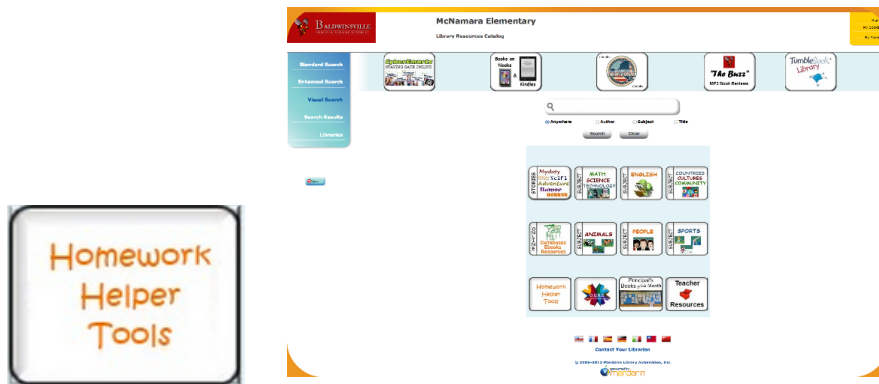
Laurie has also helped her librarians teach students to produce and upload MP3 Book Reviews. Clicking "The Buzz" button (top bar, right side) links directly to a saved list of all titles in the catalog that include an MP3 Book Review.

(NOTE: Oasis/Web OPAC 2.80 update includes a "Bookbag" feature that makes it easier to save and retrieve search lists like this one; click here).

"This way the web catalog becomes about multimedia, real learning where kids can see their work and other students' work," Laurie says. "And you can do the same thing with artwork and music; you can scan images, anything. If you can make it electronic, you can use it in Mandarin's catalog. It's really that simple. And it develops a whole new skill set using technology that ties into common core [standards]."

Laurie gives the example of books about music.

"You can work with the music teacher to create -- or help a student create -- a short MPEG video or audio track of a student playing that kind of music."

Laurie also uses visual search to help her libraries adhere to common core standards, by integrating all subjects in one place.

"One reason I came through and looked at visual search was because I wanted something visual that could integrate all subjects in the school that need to be covered," she says. "That's where I came up with repurposing the visual search by using subject buttons to link to results lists and resources for specific topics being covered in the classroom. Making these resources easy to find allows the librarians to spend more time collaborating with staff and students. Saving search URLs helps take work out of the way."

Taking that integration a step further, Laurie has worked with one of her elementary school librarians -- Justin Ashworth -- to create a digitally interactive and collaborative learning environment using QR codes. 1st-graders come up with ideas for search topics; 5th-graders create the searches and QR codes; and 2nd- through 4th-graders use and analyze the results. The QR codes are printed on shelves throughout the library, and students can use a tablet or smart phone scanner app to access online information related to that subject.

"It's all pretty straightforward because Mandarin offers it as a straightforward process -- do a search, copy the url, paste it in, and print the QR code," Laurie says. "You don't need to be technically proficient. If 4th- and 5th-graders are doing it with little oversight, just about anyone can."

(You can access a Prezi that Justin made about the pilot project **here**.)

Laurie also appreciates the ability to customize different material type filters. She has worked with many of her librarians to create a "Non Fiction" filter, again to adhere to common core standards that emphasize non-fiction content.

(NOTE: **Oasis/Web OPAC 2.70 update** includes the ability to customize the material type filter; **click here**).

"I like the open architecture of the Mandarin software in general," Laurie says. "I can go in and customize almost anything for my librarians. Most school libraries don't want to be a cookie-cutter of somebody else. They have a collection that is unique to their area, Mandarin allows them to customize it in such a way that takes advantage of what they need and showcase it, all within an environment that is not overly complex."

"Working with you" -- moving forward we are hoping to profile a different Mandarin customer for every monthly newsletter. If you would like to suggest a future "Customer Spotlight", please drop us an email at automation@mlasolutions.com with the subject line: Customer Spotlight.