LIBRARY AUTOMATION & MANAGEMENT

Retrospective Conversion (ReCON)

Core concepts, benefits, and data migration — for screen display

SECTION 1

What is Retrospective Conversion (ReCON)?

Simple definition

ReCON is the conversion of bibliographic information from a manual card catalogue into machine-readable form, so it can be used with an automated library system, according to specified policies and standards.

Retrospective
Looking back — deals with records that already exist (the backlog)

Conversion
Changing format — from card / print to digital

Bibliographic
Details of library holdings — author, title, subject, etc.

Standard Definitions

For quoting in exams

ALA Glossary of Library & Information Science

“The process of converting the database of library holdings from non-machine-readable form to machine-readable form” — referring to records not converted during day-to-day cataloguing.

Harrod's Librarian's Glossary

“A partial or complete conversion of an existing catalogue into machine-readable form, as opposed to converting records created currently.”

ReCON vs. Current Cataloguing

	Current Cataloguing	Retrospective Conversion
Records handled	New materials arriving now	Old / backlog materials already held
How records are created	Directly in machine-readable form	Converted from card / manual form
Timing	Ongoing, day-to-day	One-time or phased project

WHY RECON?
Avoids duplicating the intellectual work of previous cataloguers.

CONDITIONS OF GOOD RECON
Quick, inexpensive, predefined format, accepted standards.

Need for ReCON

Pre-requisite for Automation

Converting holdings from non-machine-readable to machine-readable form is a pre-requisite for library automation — an automated system has nothing to work with until the backlog records are converted.

Supports Statistics & Service Improvement

Converted records let the library generate the statistics and information needed to improve existing services and introduce new ones — mattering to both the library and its patrons.

Benefits of ReCON

A

Automation & Efficiency

- Create a database for a local automation system
- Improve speed of service to users, on time
- Improve internal library procedures
- Provide flexibility
- Maximize return on automation expenditure

B

Cost Savings & Data Security

- Create one integrated file — eliminates the cost of maintaining parallel systems (card + computer)
- Protect library files — digital copies guard against loss or damage

Benefits of ReCON

C

Resource Sharing

- Create union lists
- Share bibliographic data and bibliographic resources
- Create national databases and contribute to Universal Bibliographic Control (UBC)

D

Collection Development

- Support appropriate collection development — converted data reveals strengths and gaps
- Generate statistics for improving and expanding services

SECTION 4

Data Migration

Definition

Data migration is the process of moving data from one system to another, involving a change in storage, database, or application.

When it arises: when library administrators move from an existing ILMS (Integrated Library Management System) to a new ILMS.

RECON vs. DATA MIGRATION

ReCON converts legacy manual records into machine-readable form; data migration moves existing machine-readable records between systems. Both are challenging but essential — and tools like MarcEdit support both.

Four Critical Factors in Data Migration

1

Know the Data

Audit source data before migrating — skipping this surfaces unexpected problems.

2

Clean-Up

Fix the issues found; may require software tools or third-party help.

3

Maintain & Protect

Data degrades over time — keep quality controls in place.

4

Governance

Track and report data quality to ensure integrity.

Memory aid: Know it → Clean it → Maintain it → Govern it

Role of MarcEdit in ReCON

What it is

A widely used, freely available software tool for data migration and retrospective conversion of bibliographic records.

Why it matters

Doing these tasks manually across an entire backlog is impractical. MarcEdit automates them — directly supporting the ReCON goal of conversion that is quick and inexpensive.

Key functionalities

- **Batch editing**
  Modify thousands of MARC records at once
- **Format transformation**
  Convert records between formats (crosswalks, e.g., MARC ↔ XML)
- **Record merging**
  Combine duplicate records
- **Validation**
  Check records for errors against standards

QUICK RECAP

ReCON, in Five Lines

1. ReCON converts existing (retrospective) records into machine-readable form.
2. Key sources: ALA Glossary and Harrod's Librarian's Glossary.
3. Goal: quick, inexpensive, standardized, and machine-searchable.
4. Data migration moves data between systems — Know → Clean → Maintain → Govern.
5. MarcEdit is the key tool supporting both ReCON and data migration.