Chapter 2
From Metasearching to Discovery:
The University of Florida Experience

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ABSTRACT

Many academic libraries implemented a metasearch or federated search platform as a way to expand the amount of relevant information available to library users. While the metasearch concept seemed to hold great promise, it failed to live up to expectations and users failed to embrace the technology. Nevertheless, the single search box proved to be popular with search engine users, and metasearch would prove to be a forerunner to more evolved discovery solutions. In this chapter, the authors describe experiences with a metasearch product, usability testing, and how that experience shaped decision-making for the chosen discovery solution platform. The available discovery services are explored, and the process for selection at the University of Florida Libraries is described along with the plans for future evaluation of the implemented service.

INTRODUCTION

The George A. Smathers Libraries of the University of Florida (UF) form the largest information resource system in the state. The Libraries consist of nine physically separate campus libraries. Eight are in the system known as the George A. Smathers Libraries and one (the Legal Information Center) is attached to its respective administrative unit. The University of Florida Libraries are also part of a broader state system. While maintaining a separate library catalog, UF's library catalog is also part of a shared catalog and integrated library management system among the other ten State

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University System (SUS) libraries in Florida operated by the Florida Center for Library Automation (FCLA). FCLA was established in 1984 by the Florida State legislature to automate and integrate the library catalogs of the State University Library System. UF's online public access catalog (OPAC) began with NOTIS-based software acquired in 1980. Later this software was adopted by the SUS. In 2004, the SUS libraries began migration to Aleph®[1], the Ex Libris™[2] integrated library management system. In 2007, Endeca℠[3] was added as a catalog search engine overlay and the new public catalog interface for UF and the SUS. Later in 2010, open source software, Solr Lucene, replaced Endeca℠ as the catalog search engine.

While the library catalog or OPAC evolved and access to government documents, digital collections and e-journals, books and other materials vastly improved, integrated access to databases and full-text content lagged behind. Like many other academic libraries, the University of Florida George A. Smathers Libraries' first step on the path to discovery involved the implementation of a metasearch or federated search platform. In this chapter, the authors will describe experiences with a metasearch product, the implementation and product evaluation process through user feedback and usability testing and how it shaped later decision-making for a more evolved discovery solution. The chapter concludes with a discussion of plans for a new discovery product.

DEFINITION, HISTORY, AND OVERVIEW OF METASEARCHING

A metasearch (now often used interchangeably with parallel search, federated search, broadcast search, cross-database search or search portal) is a search simultaneously conducted across several bibliographic and full-text databases, platforms, vendors, sources and protocols using a single search interface. The search results may be returned in various ways (listed by database or in a merged list; sorted by relevancy, date, or other attributes; de-duplicated or not) but always in a consistent format.

How did metasearching evolve? As Judy Luther stated in a *Library Journal* article published in 2003, "Metasearch isn't a new concept. Dialog in the 1970s and subsequently SilverPlatter executed a single search simultaneously across multiple bibliographic databases" (Luther, 2003, p. 37). The mid to late 1990s saw not only the introduction of Google (named search engine of choice in the Top 100 Web Sites for 1998 by *PC Magazine*), but also Web metacrawlers or metasearch engines such as Dogpile, WebCrawler and Metacrawler that could execute a single search query across multiple search engines to retrieve search results.

Soon after, a similar concept for libraries in the form of a library portal began appearing in the marketplace and in the literature. Library portals offered a single interface for access to a number of resources which might include the local library catalog, other library catalogs, the Internet and/or Web sites, and various other resources. In 2000, Jerry Campbell delivered a white paper at an Association of Research Libraries (ARL) membership meeting, subsequently published as a report, on the concept of a scholars' portal. "To begin with, *scholars portal* would provide a number of highly desirable gateway functions. These might include an explanatory guide to information.coms as well as cross-platform access to commercial databases" (Campbell, 2000, para. 18). In 2002, the ARL Scholars Portal Working Group issued a final report on key features needed for a "super discovery tool." "This tool needs to search, aggregate, integrate, and deliver licensed and openly available digital content across a broad range of subject fields and from multiple institutions" (ARL, 2002, para. 6). The critical core features included: "First, the ability to query two distinct streams of electronic resources and databases: "universal stream" of unrestricted resources (Web pages and searchable databases) from Web sites targeted for quality and academic relevance, and