

Chapter 15

Search Success at the University of Manitoba Libraries Pre- and Post-Summon Implementation

Lisa O'Hara

University of Manitoba Libraries, Canada

Pat Nicholls

University of Manitoba Libraries, Canada

Karen Keiller

University of New Brunswick Saint John Campus, Canada

ABSTRACT

The University of Manitoba Libraries (UML) hired an external company to perform usability testing on its website in 2008 and 2009. A component of the website testing required test participants to find particular books and articles and to identify materials on a particular specific topic using the UML's search tools. The need for a resource discovery tool was made clear when participants were not generally successful in completing these tasks. The UML released Request for Proposals (RFP) for a resource discovery tool in 2010 and shortly afterward acquired Summon™ as the successful tool. Usability testing was performed on the Summon™ resource discovery tool while it was still in beta development at UML to see if there was an improvement in search success for students. The results of the two usability studies are described in this chapter, with an emphasis on the Summon™ usability testing and suggestions for further research.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2008, as a result of both anecdotal evidence and more formal feedback from the LibQual^{®2} survey in which the University of Manitoba Libraries (UML) participated in 2003, 2006 and 2007, a Website Usability Team was created to look critically at the website to improve clients' experience. In order to perform this task as objectively as possible, the team contracted with an external company, NeoInsight, which conducted usability tests on UML's website for two short time periods in 2008 and 2009. The external consultant was selected through a Request for Proposals (RFP) process and the UML became their first library client. The Website Usability Team was pleased to have a consultant that specialized in usability rather than libraries since the Team would provide the library expertise. Results from the testing showed that students were not only having trouble locating information on the UML's website, but they were also unsuccessful in locating library materials using the UML's array of tools including the library catalogue and various subject-specific and more general databases. In identifying this problem, the company recommended a single search tool that would incorporate all of the UML's search tools. The timing of this recommendation was fortuitous in that resource discovery tools were coming to the market. A Resource Discovery Layer Task Force was formed and after an RFP process and Summon[™] was acquired and implemented in the late fall of 2009 for staff use. Usability testing was performed on the Summon[™] search engine during the beta phase to test that it would improve the search experience of UML's clients. Summon[™] was made available to students in May 2010 as "One Stop Search" with a search box directly on the UML's homepage, although there had been a link to One Stop Search since February. This chapter will discuss the results of both the external consultant's testing and the Summon[™] usability testing.

BACKGROUND

The University of Manitoba Libraries is a doctoral-level university serving over 25,000 students and the UML's collections number over 1.8 million titles in 19 libraries including eight hospital libraries. For both the external consultants' testing and the Summon[™] testing, the UML was using Sirsi-Dynix^{®3} Symphony^{®4} version 3.2 and Web2 was the web catalogue interface. The UML also uses SFX^{®5} as its OpenURL resolver which is called "GetIt@UML" on the UML site. The Libraries provide access to over 300 separate databases in a variety of subjects which support its programs and at the time of website testing databases were made available using a home-grown system. This system provided alphabetic and subject lists and also provided information about the database including a summary, number of concurrent users, whether it was SFX[®]-compliant and more. During the Summon[™] testing, the Libraries had migrated the home grown system to a Drupal system which gave the same information as the home-grown system but in a different format. Although none of these Libraries' systems were looked at comprehensively in either test, the systems and their abilities were certainly factors in the usability testing of the Libraries' website and of Summon[™].

As part of the usability testing process and investigation into resource discovery tools the Website Usability Team and then the Resource Discovery Layer Task Force examined the literature available in the area. Since the focus of this chapter is usability testing, only the relevant literature on usability testing will be discussed. Most definitions of usability are based on either the International Organization for Standardization definition or Nielsen (Bevan, 2006; Nielsen, 1993, 2000; Y. Chen, Germain, & Rorissa, 2009). Usability is often associated with five dimensions: learnability, efficiency, memorability, errors, and satisfaction (Nielsen, 1993). The best definition of usability for our purposes was found in a 2001

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