

Chapter 16

Fostering Discovery through Web Interface Design: Perpetual Beta as the New Norm

Juliet Kerico

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, USA

Paul Anthony

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, USA

Chris Bulock

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, USA

Lynn Fields

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, USA

ABSTRACT

In 2009, the Library & Information Services (LIS) Web Task Force of Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE) was charged with improving its website in light of the increasing challenges presented by organizing, maintaining, and promoting its rapidly expanding selection of electronic resources. Due to budgetary constraints, a commercial tool for improving resource discovery was not an option. The Task Force chose to consider improved Web design as a solution to the problem. The resulting process of ongoing library Web site redesign, fueled by extensive user feedback at multiple stages, is discussed. In addition, the progression from a paper-based survey to an observation study of users is outlined and analyzed. Such activities inform the user experience and provide an opportunity to use improved design to reinforce principles of library instruction.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-1821-3.ch016

INTRODUCTION

New resource discovery tools continue to enter the market in an attempt to answer the call for more user-friendly and efficient searching capability. However, many smaller libraries are finding it difficult to afford the cost of these new commercial tools, and despite the best efforts of their developers, no one tool seems capable of perfectly meeting all the needs of a library or its users. Whether or not cutting-edge discovery software is purchased and utilized, consideration of user expectations in web design remains a key factor in ensuring user satisfaction and research success. This chapter focuses on the efforts of a newly formed Web Task Force within Library & Information Services (LIS) at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE). This small group of library faculty and staff members, charged with assessing and redesigning the Library webpage, began what is now an ongoing process of library Web site redesign, fueled by user feedback at multiple stages. The process of survey development and administration that was used by the Web Task Force, as well as the progression from a paper-based survey to an observational study of users will be described. Additionally, the philosophy of “perpetual beta” in web design as an alternative to, or enhancement of, commercial Web-scale discovery tools will be discussed, with a focus on how this methodology presents low-cost opportunities for significant improvement of information-seeking behavior through periodic user observation and redesign.

BACKGROUND

Library & Information Services (LIS) of Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE) serves approximately 14,000 students. Undergraduate enrollment numbers about 11,300, while graduate and professional schools account for another 3,300 students. In 2010, the Library’s Web site had 359,563 visits. LIS electronic resources recorded

571,544 full text downloads, and the link resolver recorded 150,918 click-throughs. Although the library currently has access to WorldCat^{®1} Local Quick Start, a version of the service free to all institutions that subscribe to WorldCat[®] on First-Search, it offers the ability to search only OCLC databases, and users cannot connect directly to external full text. In addition, WorldCat[®] Local Quick Start provides no method for customizing holdings display, thus severely limiting the integrated resource discovery experience an institution is able to present to its users.

When an institution is unable to implement a commercial Web-scale discovery tool, it must rely on other methods for improving resource discovery, namely improved web design and user education. Whether serving patrons at the Research & Information Desk, through formal bibliographic instruction, or in the design of the library Web site, all libraries aim to adhere to a coherent philosophy of library instruction. The accepted current framework for academic library instruction, the *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* developed by the Association of College and Research Libraries, also forms the basis of library instruction activities at LIS. The library’s mission is accomplished by:

1) fostering information literacy skills; 2) supporting faculty by providing their students with research skills needed to successfully complete specific assignments and coursework; and 3) fostering campus productivity by making faculty and staff aware of information resources and providing information literacy sessions in the use of those resources. (Library Instruction & Information Literacy Program Web site, LIS, SIUE, <http://siue.libguides.com/content.php?pid=132799&sid=1138682>)

In addition to making improved resource discovery more affordable, the decision to embark upon a Web site redesign project involving user input is, in its most basic and classical sense, an

13 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:
www.igi-global.com/chapter/fostering-discovery-through-web-interface/67826

Related Content

Catalog Maintenance and Authority Control in Discovery Systems: A Survey of Early Adopters

Pamela Harpel-Burke (2012). *Planning and Implementing Resource Discovery Tools in Academic Libraries* (pp. 469-486).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/catalog-maintenance-authority-control-discovery/67837

Remote Access Technology Problems

Diane M. Fulkerson (2012). *Remote Access Technologies for Library Collections: Tools for Library Users and Managers* (pp. 149-161).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/remote-access-technology-problems/63991

Using Consistent Naming Conventions for Library Electronic Resources

Diana Kichuk (2008). *Electronic Resource Management in Libraries: Research and Practice* (pp. 275-293).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/using-consistent-naming-conventions-library/10039

Resource Discovery Tools: Supporting Serendipity

Tammera M. Race (2012). *Planning and Implementing Resource Discovery Tools in Academic Libraries* (pp. 139-152).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/resource-discovery-tools/67819

Evaluating and Selecting a Library Web-Scale Discovery Service

Jason Vaughan (2012). *Planning and Implementing Resource Discovery Tools in Academic Libraries* (pp. 59-76).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/evaluating-selecting-library-web-scale/67814