

Chapter 22

Putting Library Discovery Where Users Are

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ABSTRACT

A number of studies have shown that people start research with Google and other easy, convenient tools. Though they recognize the value of library content, users prefer unmediated, intuitive searching, and consult libraries less than before alternatives existed. To “bring users back,” libraries began adopting discovery systems more like Google in the late 2000s. While these systems, especially good for beginning research, are proving popular, libraries must ask how many users are finding them given how few begin research at the library. This chapter describes why and how to place library discovery systems within the user’s academic context and what tools may facilitate the process, and suggests how libraries may determine how well discovery systems are working, within and beyond this context.

INTRODUCTION

Libraries have traditionally been one of few places to find quality information for work and everyday life. While print sources moved to the Web, online search tools coalesced around librarians’ goal of helping users find and evaluate, rather than on users’ own expectations for self-sufficiency that Google and others had engendered. Library-

provided tools featured inconsistent interfaces and features, and formed content “silos” that became increasingly difficult for users to distinguish between and use as they proliferated. By the early 2000s, libraries had lost many users to Google due to its simplicity, ease of use, and increasingly large single index. Though users’ trust in libraries for the content and services they offer has remained, convenience has emerged for many as the most important factor in finding information (Connaway et al., 2011). One example of how

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Google and other search tools offer ultimate convenience is that they have become directly embedded in the very Web browser software that users use every day.

Libraries have increasingly responded to the loss of users by offering federated search, next-generation catalogs, and Web-scale discovery systems. These three types of products have progressively helped libraries' efforts and made the process of starting research easier, but each has the same set of problems. For example, many librarians are less comfortable using and recommending these tools because they are built to meet user, rather than librarian, expectations. However, the chief problem is arguably that most libraries have expected users to find these tools at their own websites, which is not where most users start research (DeRosa et al., 2010).

It is incumbent on libraries to offer discovery tools in contexts and systems where all users need to carry out learning-related and business functions (Gibbons, 2005). As a Web browser is required to use the Web, enterprise software such as portals and learning management systems (LMS) are increasingly required for academic users to function. In many cases, students use a portal to register, check schedules and grades, and pay tuition and other bills. More and more courses have some component in the LMS, whether simply a syllabus and grades, or extending to online readings, assignments and quizzes, discussion and other group work, and more. Libraries have begun to embed discipline-specific resources, and now discovery tools, directly into these environments.

This chapter will frame why it is important to put discovery tools where users are. It will detail approaches to embedding discovery tools into enterprise portals and LMSs as two examples (though others are suggested in the conclusion). It will close by suggesting how libraries may determine how well discovery tool placement is working to connect users with the vast, valuable content that these tools expose.

BACKGROUND: WHERE TO EMBED DISCOVERY AND WHY

The tradition of libraries as research mediators has clearly given way to a new reality of easy, convenient direct user searching. A 2002 report from the Pew Charitable Trust's Pew Internet & American Life Project found that 73 percent of college students use the Internet more than their library when searching for information, while only nine percent use the library more than the Internet (Jones & Madden, 2002).

OCLC®'s 2005 *Perceptions of Librarians and Information Resources* study reported that 89 percent of undergraduate and graduate students use Web search engines to begin research, while only two percent of users began research on a library website (DeRosa et al., 2005). OCLC®'s 2010 *Perceptions* study reported that 83 percent of college students use search engines to begin information searches, and that zero percent begin searches at the library website. Further, the study found that "the number of college students using the library Web site declined" from 61 percent in 2005 to 57 percent in 2010 (DeRosa et al., 2010, p. 52), and that "college students feel that search engines trump libraries for speed, convenience, reliability and ease of use" (though "libraries trump search engines for trustworthiness and accuracy;" DeRosa et al., 2010, p. 54).

The 2010 Project Information Literacy progress report entitled "Truth Be Told" found that the number of survey respondents who used scholarly research databases for course-related research dropped from 94 percent in 2009 to 88 percent in 2010 (along with a remarkable drop for everyday life research from 66 to 40 percent), compared to a smaller drop in respondents who used search engines including Google (96 percent in 2009 to 92 percent in 2010 for course-related research, and 99 to 95 percent for everyday life research). Arguably of greatest concern to libraries is the Project Information Literacy finding that 84 percent of respondents' most difficult step in

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