

Chapter 28

Early Adoption: EBSCO Discovery Service at Illinois State University

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides a case study of EBSCO Discovery Service™ at Illinois State University's Milner Library. After a formal selection process, Milner chose EBSCO Discovery Service™ to replace its federated search engine. The implementation team considered what local collections to include, ways to present catalog data, and the customizations to make. EBSCO Discovery Service™, locally called Search It, was implemented in August 2010. During the Fall, six informal usability sessions were conducted to determine Search It's ease of use for students. Since Milner's initial implementation, several changes have been made to Search It locally and by EBSCO. The presentation of Search It on Milner's website also changed and became more prominent, due to a Web site redesign and user feedback. Statistics indicate that EBSCO Discovery Service™ has resulted in a significant increase in Milner's database usage.

INTRODUCTION

Illinois State University is a Carnegie Doctoral/Research University located in Normal, Illinois. Named for an early university librarian, Milner Library is the only library at Illinois State Uni-

versity. It has more than 1.6 million items in its collection, including approximately 70,000 electronic journals and 200 databases.

Milner Library, an active member in CARLI (Consortium for Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois), first offered a federated search system to the university community in 2006. WebFeat®², fully subsidized by CARLI, was the system used.

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Early Adoption

In 2009, CARLI did not renew WebFeat® for its member libraries and the WebFeat® vendor announced an end of life date for the product and plans to merge it with another system. These events spurred Milner Library to investigate new federated search products. Shortly after the search began, resource discovery tools became available. Milner Library's federated search task force found the discovery concept intriguing, with a potential to overcome problems of traditional federated search products. The task force decided to evaluate the new discovery products along with federated search systems.

SELECTION

The process of selecting a resource discovery tool for Milner Library began in October 2009. The Dean's Technology Advisory Committee (DTAC), which shepherds Milner's technology initiatives, created a federated search task force with representatives from the Public Services, Systems and Electronic Resources units. The task force had two goals: find a replacement for WebFeat® and improve cross-database searching for end users.

The task force began the selection process by researching existing federated search products and identifying vendors to contact for additional information. During this initial phase, resource discovery tools were released and included in the discussion. However, since the technology was very new and funding for a new product was uncertain, the task force focused on traditional federated search products.

By January 2010, the task force had identified three vendors to invite for on-campus demonstrations. Each of the vendors had a federated search product, and their resource discovery tools were available or would be available soon. The vendors were asked to demonstrate both the federated search and resource discovery tools. The task force invited all Milner Library faculty and staff

to attend the demonstrations and provide feedback on the systems.

Following the demonstrations, the task force realized that the search technology advancement displayed by resource discovery tools was an opportunity for Milner Library to provide users with a better search experience. Since there were indications that resource discovery tools were significantly more expensive than federated search products, the task force consulted with DTAC and the library Dean about funding. Enough funding was available to pursue a resource discovery tool, but a Request for Proposal (RFP) was needed, since the cost of a resource discovery tool could potentially exceed the university's purchasing threshold that triggers a RFP.

The RFP was written in such a way that a vendor could respond with information on a federated search system, a resource discovery tool, or both products. Some of the specific questions listed in the RFP included the process for incorporating catalog data into the system, interoperability with other systems, and customization options. The university posted the RFP in March 2010, and it ran for four weeks. Three vendor responses were received.

The task force considered a variety of information to help reach a final decision. In addition to the RFP responses, the group utilized insights gained from Milner's WebFeat® experience. Another factor was the expectations and information-seeking behaviors of students. Studies have indicated that convenience and speed are important to users (Connaway, Dickey, & Radford, 2011; De Rosa, 2006). The task force also had feedback from the library faculty and staff who attended the vendor demonstrations in January. Based on all of this information, the task force chose EBSCO Discovery Service™ (EDS) as the best product to replace WebFeat®. Recognizing a need to continue federating some resources, the task force recommended that EBSCOhost®³ Integrated Search™⁴ be purchased to provide cross-platform searching for nearly all online

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