

Chapter 31

Primo Central: A Step Closer to Library Electronic Resource Discovery

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ABSTRACT

Vanderbilt University implemented Primo Central™ in early 2010. Although several factors went into the decision to adopt Primo Central™ early in its development, this chapter focuses on the initial reasons that Vanderbilt considered using Primo Central™, methods used to determine if the service was being used, and challenges encountered, both during implementation and ongoing. The chapter also discusses items that should be considered when subscribing to and implementing the Primo Central™ Index. The last portion of the chapter discusses possible ways Primo Central™ content can be leveraged for future services.

INTRODUCTION

Vanderbilt University was founded in 1873 by Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt when the Commodore gave \$1 million to endow the building of the University. This was the Commodore's only major philanthropy. The Peabody College for Teachers, founded in 1875, merged with Vanderbilt in 1979.

The University currently offers undergraduate degrees in the liberal arts and sciences as well as education and human development, engineering, and music. In addition to undergraduate degrees, Vanderbilt offers graduate degrees in medicine, religion, law, and management, as well as many other areas. The Library employs 210 library staff and 160 student assistants in ten different libraries and two offsite storage locations. During the 2010/2011 school year, enrollment included a

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total of 12,714 students including 5,835 graduate and professional students. In 2011 the Vanderbilt Graduate School of Education was ranked 1st by the US News and World Report, and Vanderbilt University was ranked as the 17th best national undergraduate university.

In order to serve the needs of a diverse student body, the library provides access to an increasing number of electronic materials from a wide array of sources. In addition to subscription materials, the Vanderbilt University Library continues to increase the number of unique collections that can be accessed online. As a result of the significant investment in materials, the library consistently works to increase awareness of the materials available to users in their academic pursuits. When Vanderbilt was first considering Primo Central™, it was already providing several tools to users to access both physical and electronic collections. These tools included SirsiDynix Symphony^{®2} ILS, SFX^{®3} Openurl resolver, Metalib, Primo^{®4}, and Verde^{®5} from ExLibris™⁶. In addition to these commercial packages, the library also has a locally-developed database of databases and utilizes Umlaut, the open source front-end for SFX[®] developed by Ross Singer at Georgia Tech University and currently maintained by Jonathan Rochkind of Johns Hopkins University.

Vanderbilt implemented Primo Central™ as another tool to enhance the user experience and increase visibility of some resources that the library selected. While the implementation of Primo Central™ has provided many challenges, the most significant as of this writing has been communication about what the Primo Central™ index is in the context of Primo[®].

BACKGROUND

Vanderbilt was a Primo[®] development partner with ExLibris™. During many of the early discussions of Primo, one goal was to provide a single search method for accessing the quality material that the

Library licenses and owns. The first attempt to search journal articles was made using Metalib, a federated search tool. The results were disappointing due to both slow search speed and the results returned; only a limited number of results were returned for each selected database, with no sense of ranking by relevance overall. Vanderbilt attempted to combine the federated search and the local search, but the performance and consistency were ultimately unacceptable for the desired application. This was not much of a surprise since the Z39.50 protocol used by Metalib was developed in the age of dial-up internet access and was intended as a way to search MARC resources and not full-text resources. The protocol has been enhanced over the years and federated search tools have continued to develop new methods (such as xml gateways) for searching, but the fact that each database is indexed using a ExLibris different set of rules and results are returned using different algorithms continues to be a barrier to fast and consistent search results. As a result of these limitations, Vanderbilt implemented a two-tab interface for searching. The first tab included the library catalog, several locally created database resources, and the U.S. Congressional Serial Set, while the second included federated searching using Metalib. Even after implementing this solution, ExLibris™, Vanderbilt and other institutions continued to discuss the ultimate goal of quick and universal access. The ExLibris™⁷ response to these discussions is Primo Central™.

CONCEPT OF PRIMO CENTRAL IN CONTEXT WITH PRIMO

The first issue encountered, and an ongoing challenge even now, is expressing the difference between Primo[®], Primo Central™, and federated searching. Defining the difference between these items is easy technically but difficult conceptually. Primo[®] is the search interface and allows a user to input a search term and search multiple

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