

## Chapter 36

# WorldCat Local: A Transformative Solution

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### ABSTRACT

*OCLC's WorldCat<sup>®1</sup> Local has offered users at Macalester College information discovery and retrieval experiences well beyond what was provided by traditional library catalogs. WorldCat<sup>®</sup> Local has seamlessly exposed campus users to a range of resources including institutional repository items, vendor-based database content, digital collections, traditional local collections, and library holdings worldwide. In this new information environment, the ability to search only one library's traditional collection is fast becoming an outdated notion, especially in the age of Google. This chapter describes how the library at Macalester College has harnessed the power of a new form of discovery system and transformed the user experience for staff, faculty, and students.*

### INTRODUCTION

Libraries continue to search for a discovery system that offers users a powerful, productive, and interactive information retrieval experience well beyond what is offered by traditional local catalogs. OCLC's WorldCat<sup>®</sup> Local product provides a unique means of meeting this goal. This chapter will describe the vision, architecture, and

functionality of WorldCat<sup>®</sup> Local and the implications for libraries and users. The chapter will discuss how these offer significant opportunity to think seriously and creatively about a discovery system that may render obsolete the library's traditional discovery tool, the local online catalog, and the typical user experience with such systems. Through Macalester's DeWitt Wallace Library experience, data collected, user observations, and future plans, the chapter will also illuminate how

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the implementation of WorldCat® Local can be transformational for a library.

## **BACKGROUND**

A library discovery layer is defined by Lorcan Dempsey (2010) as “a single point of access to the full library collection across bought, licensed and digital materials.” In addition, a discovery layer “[...] provide[s] more functionality, such as federated searching, faceted browsing, spell checking and more.” (Yang & Hofmann, 2011, p. 268). While WorldCat® Local meets these definitions; it goes beyond them in several ways. Most significantly, users of WorldCat® Local are automatically exposed, in every search, to resources in libraries worldwide, resulting in a unique and powerful search experience. Ultimately, this is a critical distinction. A user interacting with WorldCat® Local versus a more traditional catalog or traditional discovery layer is exposed to the wide breadth of information available on a topic, as opposed to what their local library, or at best their local library consortium, happens to own.

Macalester College is a small, internationally focused, liberal arts institution located in Saint Paul, Minnesota. In 2011, the student population was 1,987. Opportunities to expose users to a wider set of information than what has traditionally been possible for smaller institutions, is perhaps more significant for a smaller library such as the Macalester College library. When WorldCat® Local became available, staff at the Macalester library saw it as an opportunity to ensure that students, faculty, and staff are exposed to and have access to the best possible and widest range of information from around the world.

The Macalester library, as part of a consortium of local college libraries, has for many years used the III Millennium integrated library system. The library has also experimented with using ExLibris™<sup>2</sup> MetaLib<sup>®3</sup> federated search product, but discontinued the subscription of this product in

2009. WorldCat® Local is the only resource the library currently uses to offer a federated search experience for its patrons. The library continues to use ExLibris™ SFX<sup>®4</sup> link resolver product; however, it is currently evaluating the WorldCat® Local link resolver which is included with a WorldCat® Local subscription.

Using the term “discovery layer” to define WorldCat® Local is somewhat limiting. Initially, discovery layers were intended to overlay a catalog and to offer a more sophisticated and pleasing user interface. Over time, and it became possible to point to or incorporate records from resources beyond the catalog, such as subscription databases or open-access repositories. WorldCat® Local is quite different in its development, architecture, and many of its available features. This chapter will highlight the areas where WorldCat® Local is distinct from other discovery layers, what challenges it presents, and what has changed in the library since adopting this product. This will be followed by a discussion of the community’s experience of using WorldCat® Local at Macalester College.

## **MAIN FOCUS OF THE CHAPTER**

### **Design and Development**

A significant aspect of WorldCat® Local is that it has not been built for librarians but for users, and there is a recurring theme of “design for users, not librarians.” As a result of a strong focus on the user, there are no longer MARC record views or the ability to search in every possible way on terms that only library staff understand. This has caused consternation among some staff, requiring them to find ways to work around this limitation. OCLC has considered adding more staff-focused functionality but not at the expense of the general user.

The development of this product follows a more Google-like pattern in that it undergoes

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