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Use of Discovery Tools in ARL Libraries

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Abstract

Libraries provide discovery tools as a means to bring together resources that will assist researchers in locating the best sources for their information needs. As the Web evolves and user expectations for library resources change, librarians are questioning the effectiveness of these tools and are considering if libraries should explore other options that could provide a similar or better user experience. Survey invitations were e-mailed to academic libraries that were members of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) to investigate current trends in the use of discovery tools at their institutions. Twenty-five of the 112 libraries responded. The survey results point to areas where improvements are most needed.

Introduction

User expectations for library resources have changed dramatically as the Web has evolved. Library researchers are impatient with searching in multiple databases to access siloed information. As a consequence, librarians are seeking better ways to integrate and present information. Librarians are now experimenting with a variety of tools designed to discover information. Discovery tools attempt to combine traditional MARC21 records from the catalog with other types of metadata that can include a combination of full-text articles, Open Archives Initiative (OAI) harvested data, or other structured metadata. Librarians determine the content that should be included, but recent efforts have not always been entirely successful because vendors do not consistently support all content. Librarians continue to question what the best approach is, or even if libraries should invest in a vendor-supported tool when tools like Google Scholar or open source software could provide a similar, if not better, user experience. The purpose of this study was to gather opinions about the current state of discovery tools among the ARL academic libraries and to identify any trends they are pursuing.

Literature Review

A paper by Marshall Breeding (2015), sponsored by the National Information Standards Organization (NISO) on the Future of Library Resource Discovery, highlights the current state of discovery tools including the observation that the history of library tools is dominated by the article/indexing industry and integrated library system (ILS) vendors.

One of the advantages of a discovery tool, as Breeding (2015) points out, is its ability to offer a patron view that differs from the view that staff require for managing library resources. According to Breeding, discovery tool features that need improvement include known-item searching, relevancy ranking, incorporation of emerging technology like bX from Ex Libris that dynamically links non-textual associations through log analysis to offer related content, and better presentation of results through OpenURL links as well as connections to learning management systems using the Learning Tools Interoperability framework.

A variety of user studies have been conducted to analyze the effectiveness of discovery tools. Asher, Duke and Wilson compared EBSCO Discovery Service (EDS), Summon, and Google Scholar with the conventional library resource (catalog) discovery with a mixed group of

students from Illinois Wesleyan University and Bucknell University. The authors noted the importance of "back-end" or hidden functionality that could improve the success of search results and reduce students' dependency on default settings. "It is clear that some of the observed deficiencies in students' search practices could be at least partially addressed- without students' knowledge- by choosing to structure the discovery tools' default settings in such a way that students are led to particular types of resources first within the search results" (2013, 477). Ciccone and Vickery also compared EBSCO, Google Scholar, and Summon with a focus on relevancy rankings. They determined that EDS and Summon were very similar. "Google Scholar performed similarly to Summon and EDS for known-item searches, but outperformed both discovery products for topical searches" (2015, 47).

Djenno, Insua, Gregory, and Brantley (2014) conducted a usability study comparing Summon and WorldCat Local. They discovered that searchers used facets more often in Summon than in WorldCat Local, and queries for books resulted in more successful results in WorldCat Local than in Summon. Overall, they found that patrons were more satisfied with the results from Summon than WorldCat Local because they perceived that the results were more comprehensive and relevant. A usability study completed by Fagan, Mandernach, Nelson, Paulo, and Saunders (2012) on EDS found similar results. Their results substantiated previous studies that pointed to confusion about what content is searched and when a discovery tool is better than a more targeted resource.

Niu, Zhang, and Chen compared Primo with an open source tool, VuFind, using transaction logs along with observed user behavior. The authors found similarities in the way the systems were used by searchers. "Commonalities include (a) keyword search was dominant in text search for both tools, (b) faceted actions were less common compared to text search, (c) most search sessions were very brief with only a few actions (less than four query submissions) and the queries users typed into the search box were usually two- or three-term words, and (d) most search sessions (>50 percent) had the original queries reformatted." (2014, 430-431) When participants were asked to select the best tool for their task, they selected VuFind for books and Primo for articles.

The question of keyword searching was undertaken by Dempsey and Valenti to evaluate whether or not instructions on keyword searching led to improved search results. The authors reported that after instruction students were still having difficulty constructing good keyword searches. (2016)

Brett, Lierman, and Dodds reported on a project to modify Primo to make the interface easier for students to understand and to use. They redesigned facets, changed tabs to drop-down boxes, added more white space, and renamed options. Even though the redesign was intended to improve searching, the students did not respond as anticipated. They ignored navigation options in search results instead preferring to click on title links, and appeared to lack an understanding of what they were being asked to do. (2016) The lesson from this experiment seems to indicate that redesigning the front-end without regard to users' search experience will not necessarily result in an improved tool. Nelson and Turney (2015) explored how concepts from commercial sites like Google could be applied to discovery tools to make them more intuitive. They suggested that using familiar icons, collapsible/expandable limiters that imitate commercial websites and eliminating library jargon like "source types" would improve discovery tool intelligibility for users. The offerings by vendors for discovery tools was highlighted in an article

by Scardilli. (2016) She summarized the strengths of Primo, Summon, WorldCat Discovery Services, BiblioCore, Axiella Arena, Iguana, SirsiDynix Enterprise, and Encore Discovery Solution. The author noted that differences between systems included the presence or absence of features like API support, widgets for incorporating chat systems or other help aids, and recommenders. She also touched on OPAC functionality and interlibrary loan inclusion, as well as indexing strategies that influence relevancy.

Multiple factors influence the success of a discovery tool. Dulle and Alphone (2016) surveyed 200 undergraduates on their use of the LibHub discovery tool. They determined that 60 percent of the respondents were referred to the tool by their instructors. Barriers to use included an insufficient number of computers in the library, deficient search skills, lack of wireless access, and slow internet speed.

A 2014 Ithaka S&R report posed the question "does discovery still happen in the library?" The report recognized that different user groups have different needs. "Among faculty members, discrete practices emerge for known item searching, exploratory searching, and current awareness, with discipline serving as an extremely important variable for all three of these discovery cases." (Schonfeld, 2014, 8).

Clearly, the reported research has used a variety of methods and focused on different aspects of discovery assessment. The research on discovery tools summarized here points to many shortcomings in the tools that have left librarians unsatisfied. This dissatisfaction reflects both librarians' opinions and user experiences with discovery tools. What is missing from the discussion is an assessment of which areas of these tools are most problematic and if libraries are changing discovery tools in their search for a better solution. To obtain a clearer picture of current perceptions about discovery tools, a survey was conducted to gather more information on librarians' opinions about the tools used in their libraries and future plans for the use of tools in their libraries.

Methods

The web-based survey was designed to collect information about the use of discovery tools at particular institutions and their intentions regarding making changes to those tools. The survey consisted of fifteen questions (see Appendix A) about features and important areas previously identified in the research literature. ARL academic libraries were selected because most have discovery tools and provide a representation of academic libraries. Canadian ARL university libraries whose websites were written only in French were eliminated from the survey. Survey invitations were e-mailed in June of 2017 to one library administrator at each of the 112 ARL academic libraries.

Findings

Twenty-five surveys were returned for a response rate of 22 percent. Respondents did not necessarily answer every question; as a result, some questions had lower response numbers. Respondents came from institutions in 22 states and one Canadian province. Table 1 summarizes the tools used by the libraries that responded to the survey. Forty-eight respondents used Primo, with Summon (20%) ranking as the second most used tool.

Table 1 Tools represented in the Study

System	Percentage	Number
ExLibris Primo	48%	12
Proquest Summon	20%	5
EBSCO EDS	16%	4
III Encore Duet	4%	1
III Encore Synergy	4%	1
OCLC WorldCat Discovery	4%	1
None	4%	1
Total		25

Nine of the 24 respondents (36 percent) indicated their institution changed to a different discovery tool within the last five years. Table 2 shows the tools that the nine libraries changed to within the last five years. Fifteen had not changed their discovery tool within the last five years while nine had selected a new system. Within this group, a variety of new tool were chosen, with Primo (n=3) selected as a new tool in higher numbers than EDS and Summon, each with two libraries selecting to switch to these tools.

Table 2 Discovery tool changes within the last five years

	Have you changed your discovery tool in the last 5 years?		
Discovery tool changed in the last five years	yes, we changed our tool	No, we have not changed our tool	Total
What is your current discovery tool? EBSCO EDS	2	2	4
III Encore Duet	1	0	1
III Encore Synergy	0	1	1
Ex Libris Primo	3	9	12
ProQuest Summon	2	3	5
OCLC WorldCat Discovery	1	0	1
Total	9	15	24

Five of the 24 respondents (21 percent) indicated that their institution was considering or was in the process of selecting a new tool. A cross tabulation between plans to change systems and the current system is shown in table 3.

Table 3 Respondents considering changing discovery tools

What is your current discovery tool?		Our institution is considering, or in the process of selecting a different discovery tool	Our institution has no plans to change our current discovery tool	
What is your current discovery tool? Total	EBSCO EDS	1	3	4
	III Encore Duet	1	0	1
	III Encore Synergy	0	1	1
	Ex Libris Primo	2	7	12
	ProQuest Summon	1	0	4
	OCLC WorldCat Discovery	0	1	1
	Never used a discovery tool	0	0	1
Totals		5	12	24

     The next question asked survey respondents to identify what user assessment had been undertaken with their discovery tools. Eleven percent of the respondents' libraries solicited input from users, while other institutions were planning to conduct a study in the future. Opinions varied on the usefulness of the studies as was reflected in the comments added by respondents. One comment pointed to the need to evaluate metadata as part of the evaluation process because discovery is not just about the experience of searching, it is about the effectiveness of the software to present useful results that are relevant. Another respondent commented that users may be satisfied thinking their search has retrieved everything, but librarians know more about what the discovery tool does not include, causing them to be more critical of results.

When asked for opinions on satisfaction with the article choices included in the discovery tool, 24 percent were very satisfied, 60 percent were satisfied and 12 percent were not satisfied. The comments from this question pointed to the lack of a comprehensive solution that would include all or most databases for which libraries have subscriptions. Other shortcomings included the inability to limit to popular non-peer reviewed articles.

When asked about relevancy rankings, 12 percent were very satisfied, 56 percent were satisfied, and 16 percent were not satisfied. Satisfaction with limiters and facets showed similar responses with 16 percent replying very satisfied, 76 percent satisfied, and 4 percent not satisfied. Respondents were asked about their satisfaction with the amount of instruction required for users to be successful. Twenty percent were very satisfied, 72 percent were satisfied with 4 percent indicating that users have trouble using the tool.

Most respondents were either satisfied (26 percent) or very satisfied (64 percent) with the ability to customize the tool. Among the 16 percent who were not satisfied, comments included the need for application developers to customize the tool, needing more branding options, and complications for customization because of consortia arrangements.

Sixteen percent were very satisfied with the presentation of results, 48 percent were satisfied with the results, and only 12 percent were dissatisfied. Comments provided in the open-ended portions of the survey included statements about the interface design not being intuitive, or appearing to be not as modern as other web applications. These design problems can make the tools less engaging for students, difficulty interpreting results about formats, and concerns about accessibility. Respondents believed that the results can be overwhelming when articles are integrated with books, making it difficult for a patron to find the book they are seeking.

The discovery tools listed in the survey included a variety of tools for supporting services associated with library research. The top ten inclusions were: articles (96 percent), link resolver (91 percent), citation export (91 percent), book jackets (87 percent), search suggestions (78 percent), OAI harvesting (74 percent), delivery requesting (74 percent), image sources (70 percent), and course reserves (70 percent). Several respondents commented that they were using tools outside the discovery layer for library services like reserves, item requesting, and searching the catalog and holdings.

When surveyed about desirable options, respondents mentioned interoperability for book jackets, transferring searches to other systems like INN-Reach, virtual shelf browsing, and the need for additional vendors included in search results. Table 4 shows a breakdown from the survey of responses by discovery tool.

Table 4 Discovery tool areas for improvement

Area for improvement	EDS	Encore Duet	Encore Synergy	Primo	Summon	Worldcat	Total
OAI harvesting					1		1
Link resolver							0
Citation export							0
Patron ratings				1			1
Patron reviews				1			1
Book jackets			1	1			2
Articles				1			1
Call number maps	2			4	2	2	10
Virtual browsing	2		1	1	2	1	7
Delivery requests	2			1			3
Holds & recalls	1			2	1		4
License info.				1	2		3
Multimedia/images					1		1
Course reserves	1			1			2
Patron tags					1		1
Spell check				1			1
Search suggestions				2	1	1	4
Usage statistics			1	3			4

When respondents were asked to consider if discovery tools have changed the way patrons do research 39 percent selected "yes, for the better," 26 percent selected "yes, but it has made some things more difficult," and 4 percent responded no. A variety of opinions were stated about the usefulness of discovery tools for research. Concerns about discovery tools included inclusiveness, metadata for article searches that is less robust than domain-specific databases, and lack of acceptance by librarians for the discovery tool that result in referrals to the catalog. Another concern was that a library discovery tool does not compare well with a less complicated tool like Google Scholar that appeals to patrons already accustomed to web searching.

Additional comments indicated that work is needed to reduce the complexity of discovery tools. Suggestions included modernizing metadata and improving metadata mapping so full-text article sources, books from the catalog, institutional repositories, and web-based content result in better integrated search indexes. Another area for improvement was better integration between discovery tools and library services such as course reserves, interlibrary loan and learning. One respondent noted that libraries cannot forget about web scale discovery through services like Google, which is where many users will begin their search before coming to the library. The following comment sums up many of the respondents' sentiments:

> "The discovery systems available to libraries, are not the best discovery tools available to our users (at least a lot of the time, or for all purposes). There are numerous tools that are more comprehensive, employ better algorithms, apply a better relevancy system, and are more suited to individual needs than our library system. (Google Scholar, Xarchive, Papers, or some social media platforms)."

Alternative Discovery Tools

The majority of respondents to the survey are using a proprietary discovery tool developed by a major library vendor, however, a few libraries are exploring methods of their own. This willingness to expend local resources to find better solutions is an indication of library dissatisfaction with "out-of-the-box" vendor solutions. One library reported using a combination of Blacklight Open Source for holdings with EBSCO for presenting results as their discovery tool. Another library reported a combination of two discovery tools, a customized Endeca faceted searching index and Blacklight to get results from both tools in a bento-box style interface.

An alternative discovery option was provided by one respondent from the University of Wisconsin-Madison who described an experiment underway to develop a customized search interface (https://www.library.wisc.edu/experiments/coordinated-discovery/)**.** The goal of this project is to guide patrons to where they should be looking and to provide them with a search experience tuned to the kind of resources they might use. This desired result partitions discovery into broad categories, and suggesting resources in other search categories when appropriate.

Limitations of the survey

This survey was purposefully as a survey of librarians and not of researchers or students, and; therefore, represents impressions only from librarians. It does not include detailed assessment about the functionality of any particular tool, or make comparison between tools.

Discussion

Survey comments show that librarians are still looking for a discovery tool that will better serve everyone's needs. Several themes run through the survey results: combining metadata from different sources can be problematic; there is a lack of interoperability with library services such as course management systems; too much emphasis is placed on presenting results in a library-centric manner; concerns remain over resources to manage discovery; and limitations persist on the ability to select article sources for inclusion.

Metadata

Discovery tool developers struggle with legacy catalogs and metadata that were built over decades using various standards. When combined with articles and other types of metadata, search algorithms are less effective with an inconsistent data structure. This lack of interoperable metadata contributes to librarians' dissatisfaction with results in discovery tools search results when compared to traditional catalogs.

Putting articles, books, and other resources into one result set makes for effective discovery for all resources, but some types of resources are either lost or presented ineffectively. Comprehensive and well-described metadata could help solve this problem. Discovery tools should break away from traditional ideas about author, title, subject analysis, and formats. One solution to the metadata problem highlighted in survey results could be the Bibliographic Framework Initiative (BIBFRAME). BIBFRAME, which is expressed in Resource Description Framework (RDF), is a data model for bibliographic description meant to replace MARC and to be used with linked data principles. It offers the possibility of connecting related data that was not previously linked and sharing data within the library community as well as outside of it. This effort requires cooperation among librarians, system vendors, developers, curators of cultural heritage institutions and other stakeholders but promises to make data from different sources, articles, repositories, and catalogs, more interoperable.

Library service offerings in discovery tools

Comments from the survey highlighted several limitations of discovery tools. Libraries provide services as well as collections, and most discovery tools have limited support for integration with academic courses, document delivery, reference support, instructional support, and related offerings. Little attention is being paid to virtual browsing, especially important when many libraries are moving their collections into high-density storage facilities.

Library-centric discovery layers

Some respondents expressed the view that discovery tools need to move away from presenting results in acquisition models that favor the creation of librarian-focused information, which silos information into categories like books and articles and instead think about aggregating content in ways that make sense to the researcher. One participant noted in their comments that researchers do not view content in the same way as librarians. For example, while the resources within a discovery tool may be managed in a particular way because of the way they were acquired via a package plan, this organization may not be logical organization for a researcher searching for content.

Presentation of results must be intuitive for undergraduates but functional for researchers. Unfortunately, librarians have limited ability to customize displays that will be intelligible to both novice and advanced researchers. Another shortcoming mentioned in the survey is

questionable accessibility that should be addressed to improve a tool for users with visual disabilities. Accessibility is an area where more testing and published reports of that testing could result in improvements or increasing the visibility of the problems. Libraries must be able to refresh tools to keep them relevant to different generations who are accustomed to using Google and similar search tools. In cases where libraries can make some changes to displays, they typically must employ a programmer or developer because of the complexity of tool administration. Finally, customization can become nearly impossible in consortia environments where agreements must be reached among many participants from different institutions.

Additional resources needed to improve discovery tools

Reported activities in the survey ranged from integrating Open Source applications, to providing add-on capabilities, to discovery tool redesigns. All of these activities will require library resources of staff time and money. Collaboration among libraries participating in discovery tool revisions will be essential as well as vendors' support. In addition, vendors must be willing to be more open with their systems and build integration tools that will support interoperability between their products and discovery tools from other vendors.

Article inclusion

One of the most significant limitations of discovery tools reported in the survey is the lack of flexibility in selecting article sources. The librarians wanted more control over selecting which full-text sources to include regardless of the vendor source. Limitations in selecting resources can be misleading to library patrons who expect that everything is included in a discovery tool. This defect is serious when the depth and breadth of library holdings are overlooked, and when the absence of important content negatively impacts advanced researchers who are working in less familiar multi-domain fields. Researchers who are comfortable with the literature of their specialty may work on a project that crosses into other fields that are not included in the databases with which they are familiar. Being unfamiliar with resources in other fields, the researcher may miss important articles
.

Conclusion

The future for discovery tools is difficult to predict as libraries continue to struggle to find their footing in a shifting environment of information provision. One finding of this survey is particularly interesting: 58 percent of the respondents have either changed their tool within the last five years or are planning to change their tool. This finding demonstrates that libraries are still seeking better ways to assist users in discovery. Future discovery tools will need to keep up with web search engines and will need to move into the artificial intelligence realm by providing personal assistant functionality or be left behind. Additional research that compares Google Scholar and locally created tools with vendor supported discovery tools could help direct library choices. As libraries are pressured by shrinking resources to make data driven decisions any information about discovery tool effectiveness will assist libraries in making good decisions.

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Appendix A

Survey Questions

1. What library are you responding for?
2. What is your current discovery tool?
      EBSCO EDS
      III Encore Duet
      III Encore Synergy
      Ex Libris Primo
      ProQuest Summon
      OCLC WorldCat Discovery
      Never used a discovery tool (please skip to question 14)
      If you changed to another tool, what was your old tool? If you discontinued your tool, please explain why?
3. Have you changed your discovery tool in the last 5 years?
      Yes, we changed to the tool listed above.
      No, we have not changed our tool
      We removed our discovery tool (please skip to question 14)
      Comments
4. Have you surveyed your users about their satisfaction with your library's discovery tool?
      Yes
      No
      Comments
5. How satisfied are you with the article choices you can include in your tool?
      Very satisfied
      Satisfied
      Not satisfied
      Comments
6. Are you satisfied with the relevancy ranking of search results?
      Very satisfied
      Satisfied
      Not Satisfied
      Comments
7. Are you satisfied with the facets/limiters used with searches?
      Very satisfied
      satisfied
      not satisfied
      Comments
8. Are you satisfied with the amount of instruction required for users to be successful searchers?
      Very satisfied, our users don't require much instruction.
      Satisfied, our instruction on the tool is what we expected.
      Not satisfied, our users have trouble using the tool.
      Comments
9. How satisfied are you with your ability to customize the look and feel of the tool?
      Very satisfied
      Satisfied

Not satisfied

Comments

10. How satisfied are you with the presentation of results?

Very satisfied, it is easy to understand results

Satisfied, results require some interpretation, but people learn how to read the results with a little experience

Not satisfied, users are frequently confused about what they are seeing

Comments

11. Please check all of the following that are **included** in your discovery tool

OAI harvested sites, for example, institutional repository or other locally managed resource

Link Resolver

Citation Export

Patron Ratings

Patron Reviews

Book jackets

Articles

Location maps to find call numbers

Virtual shelf browsing for nearby titles

Delivery requesting

Holds & recalls

License information and other restrictions on access

Multimedia or image sources (not book jackets)

Course Reserves

Patron Tags

Spell checks

Search suggestions for related searches

Usage statistics

Other (please specify)

12. Please check all of the following are **missing** or inadequate in your discovery tool that you would think are important and want to see included or improved in the future?

OAI harvested sites, for example, institutional repository or other locally managed resource

Link Resolver

Citation Export

Patron Ratings

Patron Reviews

Book jackets

Articles

Location maps to find call numbers

Virtual shelf browsing for nearby titles

Delivery requesting

Holds & recalls

License information and other restrictions on access

Multimedia or image sources (not book jackets)

Course Reserves

Patron Tags
Spell checks
Search suggestions for related searches
Usage statistics
Other (please specify)
13. Do you think discovery tools have changed the way your patrons do research?
Yes, for the better
Yes, but it has made some things more difficult and confusing
No, I don't think discovery tools have changed the way people find and use information for research.
Other (please specify)
14. Future plans for discovery
Our institution is considering, or in the process of selecting a different discovery tool
Our institution is considering discontinuing our discovery tool
Our institution has **no plans** to change our current discovery tool
Our institution has no plans to add a discovery tool
Comments
15. What are your thoughts on the current and future role of discovery platforms in Libraries?
I have not thought much about this question
I am concerned about the current state of discovery tools
I am concerned about the future of discovery tools
Your thoughts