Next Generation Discovery Services

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As library scholars have observed, libraries are in competition with other online information seeking services. Users have a choice of consulting a library website or an online search engine such as Google (Spiteri and Turelli, 2012). Moreover, libraries are not only competing with search engines, but social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter as well (Cahill, 2011). On social media sites, users can retrieve news right from their home pages or search for news or other information by keyword or hashtag. In order to compete with the seamless experience of search engines and social media sites, library discovery services have adopted elements of those services and focus on the end user (Vaughn, 2012). That is, by borrowing user experience principles from other popular information sites, library catalogs seek to become relevant source for information seekers. Next Generation Discovery Systems seek to serve library patrons with a simple and comprehensive search of the library catalog to remain effective and appealing to patrons.

**Web-scale Discovery in academic libraries**

One facet of Next Generation Discovery systems put to use especially in academic libraries is Web-scale Discovery. This enables users to search across the metadata and even “full-text content” of entire library collections and repositories (Vaughn, 2012, p. 33). A Web-scale Discovery search bar is a simple single bar with advanced search options that returns results in a relevancy ranked order. The end-user experience is meant to reflect that of Google; that is, the search is meant to be pleasant, simple, and accurate (Vaughn, 2012). Web-scale Discovery services offer users a quick and familiar search box through which to search all of the library’s holdings.
Using Web-scale Discovery searches in my work as a research assistant I am able to quickly find specific articles that the library holds without searching individual databases. Often I am provided with a title of an article to cite and download for my boss. Instead of having to search different databases for a specific title, I can search all of the library’s databases with one simple search. I then can click through to the appropriate full-text article if the library holds the article. While Web-scale Discovery is helpful in this instance, it is not my preferred method when I am conducting literature reviews. Those are still most effectively conducted through subject specific databases.

Social tagging in public libraries

In order to make searching the public catalog library even more interactive, Next Generation Discovery systems for public library are beginning to integrate social tagging into searches. Users are able to add tags to objects just as they would to posts on social media sites such as Twitter or Instagram and they are also able to search by those tags (Cahill, 2011). This makes the public library catalog far more interactive because instead of limiting users to search by Library of Congress Subject Headings, users are able to add tags they find relevant and also search by those tags (Cahill, 2011, Spiteri and Turelli, 2012).

Bibliocommons is a Next Generation Library catalog which enables users to enhance traditional library records with social tags (“About us,” 2016). The notion is that users are able to categorize information in a way that LCSH does not allow. I think that this is an especially applicable to social movements with popular hashtags used on social media sites. For example, the tag #blacklivesmatter may be more intuitive for a user seeking information about the BLM movement than a formal LCSH such as “United States -- Race Relations.”
One challenge with social tagging integration into the public library catalog is that it requires significant user participation in order for it to be effective (Spiteri and Turelli, 2012). In other words, users must first know that they can tag objects, then actually add tags to objects, and finally search for objects using social tags. The more patrons engage in social tagging the more robust the social tagging search capability becomes (Spiteri and Turelli, 2012). Without user participation, the social tagging feature does not enhance a user’s experience.

**Conclusion**

Presently libraries have to compete with several other information providing services. In order to be viable options for users, libraries have adopted search trends like those of online search engines and social media sites (Cahill, 2011, Vaughn, 2012). The goal is to provide users with a seamless experience from preliminary search to the end result. By integrating principles from popular sites, libraries provide powerful searches that are accessible. That is, users are able to conduct focused searches without needing extensive training or specialized knowledge. Next Generation Discovery Systems offer many accessible ways for users to acquire information and will continue to evolve with the changing trends of other information providing sites.
References


