Metasearching
Librarians Like Searching, Users Like Finding
Roy Tennant • California Digital Library

Technical Housekeeping
- Handouts available via link underneath the speaker
- Archived webcast available tomorrow at http://infopeople.org/training/webcasts/archived.html
- Evaluation pops up during Q&A, please fill it out while questions are being answered

How to Ask Questions and Make Comments

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Agenda
- Why Metasearching?
  - Definitions
  - The Problem
  - The Promise
  - Principles
- Metasearching in Libraries Today
  - Sample Implementation
  - Resources
  - Service Providers
  - Software
  - Deployment Options
  - Interaction with Other Software and Services
- Present Challenges
- Looking to the Future

Definitions
- Metasearching, federated searching, cross-database searching, broadcast searching all mean about the same thing:
  - Searching multiple sources simultaneously
- Often includes:
  - Integrated, de-duplicated search results
  - Simplified search interface
- May include:
  - Ranked results
- Is not meant to replace searching of specific databases when appropriate

The Problem
- Most users do not care where the information they need comes from, or who provides it…nor should they have to.
- But our systems presently require them to know:
  - How to select one or more databases
  - How to get to them
  - How to use the unique search options for each
- How can we create systems that minimize what the user needs to know to get what they want?
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The Promise of Metasearching

- The “Holy Grail” of resource discovery: simple to use one-stop shopping
- The simplification of a formerly complex activity (put the complexity in the back end, not the front)
- Allows the user to focus on evaluating results, not figuring out where to search
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Principles

- Only librarians like to search, everyone else likes to find
- All things being equal, one place to search is better than two or more
- “Good enough” is often just that
- The size of the result set isn’t as important as how the results are displayed (e.g., categorizing, ranking)
- Our ability to create effective one-stop searching is dependent on our ability to appropriately target user needs
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Metasearching in Libraries
Today: Resources
- Databases can be metasearched by one of the following methods:
  - Z39.50 protocol
  - SRU/SRW (XML-based Z39.50)
  - Proprietary XML protocol
  - Screen-scraping (trying to determine structure from HTML)
- Not all metasearch products support all of the above methods
  - Requires support by the database vendor

Metasearching in Libraries
Today: Service Providers
- Single-Vendor Solutions, e.g.,:
  - Elsevier’s Scopus
- Aggregators, e.g.,:
  - Google Scholar

Metasearching in Libraries
Today: Software
- Most library vendors have products
  - Stand-alone; e.g.,
    - ExLibris’ MetaLib
  - Integrated with ILS; e.g.,
    - Innovative’s Millennium Access Plus
- Products such as MuseSearch from Muse Global are sometimes integrated with vendor solutions
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Metasearching in Libraries
Today: Selecting Software

- Refer to handout: “Metasearch Software Considerations”
- Local considerations
- Application considerations
- Vendor Considerations

State of the Software

- De-duplication problems
- Simplistic (or non-existent) ranking algorithms
- Widely varying user interfaces
- Customization options vary considerably
- Poor support for resources that must be screen-scraped

Deployment Options

- Stand-alone “destination” site
- Integrated with library web site
- Audience or purpose-focused
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Interaction with Other Software

- Most metasearch applications are designed to work with OpenURL linking software:
  - SFX from Ex Libris, Sirsi Resolver, etc.
- Most library catalogs are metasearchable since they typically support Z39.50

Present Challenges

- Software still in early stage
- Solutions tend to be expensive
- Most important factor is keeping resource connections working — vendors aren’t always good at this yet
- Libraries are still determining appropriate deployment methods
- Many resources do not provide an API
- Resource providers are worried about increased search loads, loss of branding
- Users have very high expectations
Looking to the Future

- Improved software
- More resources searchable
- Wider variety of deployment examples
- Greater availability of library-developed templates and tools
- More standards (watch NISO), leading to more effective and reliable systems