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Editorial: Key Issues Facing the Industry

Dan Tonkery

In this issue of *Serials Review* several articles focus on federated searching, which is special software that is installed in the library's public access catalog to allow users to perform a search for information across multiple databases or targets. Readers will want to read Kate Noerr's article on MuseGlobal, one of the early pioneers in the federated searching business. I remember going to the MuseGlobal booth at ALA and talking with Kate when she was trying to introduce her federated search software. No one was stopping at her booth, as the concept was just too new to gain attention; now look at how successful they have become. One will find Sara Randall's article helpful on the Endeavor Discover: Finder product. Libraries looking for a how-to-do-it article should read Anne Highsmith's article on MetaLib implementation at Texas A & M University.

Federated searching is very popular in many college and university libraries and large public library systems where undergraduate populations are served. From my perspective, federated searching systems attempt to overcome a fundamental problem: we have far too many database interfaces for users to learn. Federated searching systems were developed to bring order out of the chaos that has resulted from the wide range of databases, search engines, and user interfaces now available in libraries.

The unfortunate thing is the need for federated searching in the first place. By performing a federated search the user avoids having to decide which database should be searched to locate the information, as well as having to learn how to search each database. However, by seeking a common interface, the user is giving up the ability to use the special features that the database builder incorporated into its database. At best federated searching performs a search using the lowest common denominator and yields acceptable results for only the beginning levels of users.

The undergraduate or public library user without any knowledge or training is at least able to find something. The better-informed or trained users will want to select

the databases that best meet their needs. Bibliographic instruction is still a much-needed course in many college and university libraries. The days of real search training are long gone. I am a product of the old Medline analysts training given at the National Library of Medicine where a librarian went through three long weeks of searching and indexing training. It is hard for me to imagine that anyone can just sit down, fire up a database and pound away, but that is today's reality. Users can get results without knowing the database, or worrying about vocabulary, or even knowing how to spell.

While everyone is talking about and buying federated searching systems, we should not forget the growing presence of Google Scholar (GS). Google offers a much more sophisticated form of federated searching since Scholar provides one interface with an unparalleled search engine. Public services librarians tell me that the search results on Google Scholar are getting better and better as the volume of content grows each day. The referral traffic of Google Scholar is also growing rapidly. If we look at the amount of searching that is referred from GS to PubMed or MetaPress or HighWire, the growth curve is indeed impressive. I would not be surprised if, in the near future, libraries actually train undergraduate users to use Google Scholar effectively as it offers high quality content. Currently there are only a few of the large STM publishers that are still holding out working with Google, but many of the papers in the holdout publishers are actually on Google via the author's Web site or institutional repository.

Let's leave the federated searching topic for now and as guest for the editorial, I want to turn my attention to other issues which are looming over our industry. Nearly everyone has followed the NIH initiative. Perhaps not surprising is that the first year of the volunteer program where NIH grantees were supposed to deposit their articles on PubMed Central was a dismal failure with only 4% of the eligible papers deposited. The library groups behind the Open Access movement are not surrendering the good fight but are back in full force with a new approach and much stronger political muscle. Publishers fighting the Open Access effort are going to find this next round much harder to derail or defeat.

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