

University of Washington Libraries adopt WorldCat Local as their discovery and delivery solution



Pilot program a success as library usage through WorldCat Local skyrockets

Situation

The Libraries at the University of Washington in Seattle were faced with a problem: their search and retrieval system was too complex. The Libraries were using three different catalog systems—each with their own request and delivery interfaces—but there was very little integration among them. And many students had turned to Internet services such as Google or Yahoo! to conduct their research.

To make matters worse, there was no clear connection between those Internet search results and the University of Washington Libraries' fulfillment services. "We wanted to decrease complexity for our users," says William Jordan, Associate Dean of the University of Washington Libraries, "and make it easier for them to discover and obtain the range of quality resources provided by our libraries." Additional goals included putting the resources and services of the University of Washington Libraries into the library users' information environments.

Solution

In April 2007, the University of Washington participated in the first pilot program of OCLC's new WorldCat® Local service. The library staff worked closely with OCLC to define its various fulfillment paths, and the rules for when each one was valid. WorldCat Local was able to connect users to the proper delivery channels for items they required through the WorldCat Local search box. Requests for other returnables were sent to the University of Washington Libraries' ILLiad™ system via OpenURL. "In the case of articles," says Jordan, "we decided that all requests for article full text should be resolved by our local OpenURL resolver."

AT A GLANCE

University of Washington Libraries

- UW borrowing +61% from other Summit libraries
- ILL requests +114% from 2007
- More than 31,000 OpenURL requests in each of Q4 2007 and Q1 2008

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Being a beta test site for a new service like WorldCat Local provided its share of challenges for the library staff. For example, it took effort to keep up with the fast pace of development and changes to the interface. Usability testing was a tremendous help throughout the pilot phase; it underscored which problems needed addressing, and pointed out that some perceived problems were not bothersome to users.

Results

Jordan says that the University of Washington Libraries received some very strong, positive comments from users. He notes that the changes made in response to usability testing went a long way toward correcting early functionality issues, and the interface continued to get better with each monthly release.

"I think that the WorldCat Local model is right," says Jordan. "Use network-level data for discovery, combined with local

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availability and local services for fulfillment, and provide a platform for syndicating that into other environments like Google and Yahoo!” He adds that WorldCat Local’s potential is far more attractive than “dressing up hundreds or thousands of local discovery environments with expensive catalog overlays and limited reach.”

WorldCat Local also brought several unexpected benefits to the University of Washington Libraries. Jordan says that he and the Libraries’ staff were surprised at the impact it has had on delivery services. “We suspected that breaking down those silos would help users, but we underestimated just how much of a barrier they had been.”

Jordan says he is pleased that the UW Libraries’ users are

finding WorldCat Local to be so helpful with their search and delivery requirements. He believes incorporating other content and features into WorldCat will only improve the service, and that the challenge will be to do that in a way that doesn’t compromise WorldCat Local’s value as an easy-to-use, user-centered tool.

“The usage statistics clearly show that a range of users are having success with WorldCat Local, and for me that is a true measure of how it’s working,” says Jordan.

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For more information about WorldCat Local, visit www.oclc.org/worldcatlocal. To request a quote please contact your nearest OCLC® representative.