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Technology Left Behind -- What in the WorldCat is OCLC up to?

Cris Ferguson
Furman University, cferguson13@murraystate.edu

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NISO Metasearch Initiative
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- Many different search and retrieval protocols are in use, with many providers supporting more than one access method. These include: HTTP/HTML based (76%); Z39.50 (64%); XML/SOAP (33%); SQL (30%); and legacy system and/or Telnet-based access (25%).
- The most common format for display of search results was an HTML page (84%), followed by MARC 21 (63%), proprietary XML (53%), Dublin Core (26%), and GRS-1 (21%). Although RSS and WSDL (Web Services Description Language) are not used by most survey respondents today, 20% indicated plans for future support.
- Respondents cited several benefits for allowing customers metasearch access: an increased customer base (79%), gaining a competitive edge (58%), and opportunities for partnership (53%).
- The main concerns of content providers with metasearch were: loss of control over search results (53%), loss of branding (53%), digital rights management (47%), customer support problems (42%), excessive use of system resources (37%), and the amount of communications required with other suppliers (21%).

The survey results were used by all three Task Groups in further refining their work plans and in developing use cases.

Next Steps
With a mix of librarians, software providers, and content providers, the three task groups have drawn the participation of over 60 individuals from five countries. (See the sidebar for the list of Metasearch Initiative participants and their organizations.) Each group’s first set of deliverables and recommendations was presented at NISO’s fall workshop in September 2005.

Part 2 of this article, which will appear in an upcoming issue of Against the Grain, will report on the NISO Metasearch Initiative task groups’ initial set of findings and recommendations. Official documents are posted on the NISO Metasearch Initiative Webpage (http://www.niso.org/committees/MS_initiative.html). Committee activities can be followed at the task groups’ WIKI (http://www.lib.nex.net/niso-m/).

Technology Left Behind — What in the WorldCat is OCLC up to?

Column Editor: Cris Ferguson (Electronic Resources/Serials Librarian, James B. Duke Library, Furman University, 3300 Poinsett Highway, Greenville, SC 29613; Phone: 864-294-2713) <cris.ferguson@furman.edu>

In October 2003, OCLC launched the pilot of the Open WorldCat program, an initiative which “makes records of library-owned materials in OCLC’s WorldCat database available to Web users on popular Internet search, bibliographic and book-selling sites.” (http://www.oclc.org/worldcat/open/default.htm) The program has been expanding ever since, leaving the pilot phase in October 2004.

Since making Open WorldCat a permanent program last June 2004, OCLC has continued to develop and to enhance the functionality of the program. On January 3, 2006, OCLC announced the acquisition of the assets of Openly Informatics, opening the door for even further expansion of services. This column will investigate how Open WorldCat works, recent developments in the program, and future directions for growth, touching on the recent acquisition of Openly Informatics.

Open WorldCat Partnerships
The goal of the Open WorldCat program is to make OCLC member libraries more visible on the Web and their collections more accessible to Web users. As part of this effort, OCLC has established linking partnerships with several vendors, including search engines, book vendors, and fulfillment services. Through the partnerships, Open WorldCat allows these vendors access to “millions of abridged WorldCat records.”

Both Google and Yahoo! Search are partnering with OCLC to deliver links to WorldCat records. According to Chip Nilges, Vice President, OCLC New Product Planning, “Yahoo! Search and Google are exposing a 3.4 million record set through their interfaces, including the 3 million most widely owned items in WorldCat,” representing 78 percent of the holdings in the WorldCat database.

How Open WorldCat Works
To find items held by a local library, a user conducting a search in Google or Yahoo! Search enters a search phrase that matches the title of the desired item and the phrase “find in a library.” At this time, the “Find in a Library” search online searches the title field of a record. It will not search for an author or subject. When the results of a search are displayed, links to Open WorldCat records are marked by the phrase “Find in a Library.”

Clicking on the “Find in a Library” link in the search results takes the user into the Open WorldCat record for the desired item. Once in the Open WorldCat record, the user has the option to enter his or her zip code to determine if a local library owns the item. If the book is available at a local library, the record provides a link to the library’s hours, if available, and also a link to the online catalog, letting the user check to see if the book is checked in and available.

An example of how this entire process looks to the user can be found on the Open WorldCat Web page http://www.oclc.org/worldcat/open/how/default.htm.

While in the pilot phase, Open WorldCat was open to participation by all libraries with holdings in WorldCat. As an official program, participation has been limited to those libraries that subscribe to WorldCat on the FirstSearch platform. As Nilges points out, “The program requires resources to keep running (and improving). We have added it as one of the many features an institution receives as a subscriber to WorldCat on FirstSearch, and, by participating, institutions help us put more resources into the project to encourage further innovations and features.” Those libraries that do not subscribe to WorldCat on FirstSearch will not be able to open their holdings up to users via Open WorldCat.

Toolbars
The primary disadvantage to using the “find in a library” method to search for and to access Open WorldCat records is that the user has to know to add the “find in a library” phrase to the search string. To make accessing Open WorldCat a little more user friendly, OCLC has worked with its partners to create Web-based search tools, including a special OCLC edition of the Yahoo! Search toolbar. The Yahoo! Search toolbar, while still equipped with other popular features like Anti-Spy and Pop Up Blocker, also includes a feature that allows users to search for terms in Open WorldCat. Instructions for downloading and using the toolbar are available at the Open WorldCat Web site (http://www.oclc.org/worldcat/open/how/default.htm).

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<http://www.against-the-grain.com>
For More Information


OCLC PICA. http://oceptica.org/


Open WorldCat. http://www.oclc.org/worldcat/open/default.htm


Reference Services

OCLC found that a fair number of reference questions were coming through the Open WorldCat feedback form, and, as a result, the company implemented a pilot program to provide virtual reference services to Open WorldCat users, allowing users to “submit questions electronically to the online reference services of OCLC member libraries.” (http://www.oclc.org/worldcat/open/reference/default.htm) Currently, those libraries operating on OCLC’s QuestionPoint platform and almost 150 other libraries also operating virtual reference desks on other platforms are providing the virtual reference service. Nilges emphasized that those libraries that do not wish to receive questions from the Internet-at-large are certainly allowed to opt out of participating, but thus far most have chosen to participate.

User- Contributed Content

Available since October 2005, the user- contributed content pilot enables librarians, library patrons, and other WorldCat users to associate evaluative content, like reviews and ratings, to a WorldCat record. Users wishing to contribute a review must set up a personal account, and, like the entries in Wikipedia, all content is editable by all users. It is important to note that the user- contributed content is only associated with a record; “it does not become a part of the record’s authoritative bibliographic in-

OCLC Contact Information

Bob Murphy
OCLC Communications
6565 Frantz Road
Dublin, Ohio 43017
(614) 761-5136
murphyb@oclc.org
http://www.oclc.org

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