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

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Recommended Citation
Ferguson, Cris (2006) "Technology Left Behind -- What in the WorldCat is OCLC up to?," Against the Grain: Vol. 18: Iss. 1, Article 33.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.4862

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NISO Metasearch Initiative from page 81

- 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.next.nexis/niso-ml/).

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

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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 bookselling 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 this past summer, 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 at http://www.oclc.org/worldcat/open/how/default.htm.

82 Against the Grain / February 2006

continued on page 83
For More Information


OCLC PICA. http://oclcpi.ca/


OpenWorldCat. http://www.oclc.org/worldcat/open/default.htm


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Pilot Projects

Since making Open WorldCat a permanent program, OCLC has developed several pilot projects to further enhance the functionality of the program.

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 to content is only associated with a record; “it does not become a part of the record’s authoritative bibliographic information.” (http://www.oclc.org/worldcat/open/usercontent/default.htm) Participation has been relatively slow up to this point, but Nilges notes that the user-contributed content feature is expected to be added to the WorldCat database in FirstSearch in April 2006 and use of this new functionality is expected to gain in momentum.

Online Purchasing

The online purchasing pilot gives Open WorldCat users the option to purchase books from either Baker & Taylor (http://www.btol.com/) or Amazon (http://www.amazon.com/) using a “Buy It Now” link in the Open WorldCat record for that item. As an added benefit to libraries, OCLC has set up a process for revenue sharing with librarians. “Each time a book is purchased through the “Buy It Now” Baker & Taylor store, a portion of the proceeds is shared with OpenWorldCat libraries through credits on their OCLC invoices.” (http://www.oclc.org/worldcat/open/store/default.htm) Nilges indicated that in the coming months, OCLC plans to expand this feature to include additional vendors.

In the near future, both the user-contributed content pilot and the reference services pilot are expected to move out of the pilot phase, becoming a full part of the Open WorldCat program.

Acquisition of Openly Informatics

The most recent development at OCLC, announced January 3, 2006, is the acquisition of the assets of Openly Informatics. “The key reason for this acquisition is the metadata. Openly Informatics has developed a knowledgebase of 1.2 million records with links to electronic resources that will be used to enrich WorldCat?” says Mike Teets, Vice President, OCLC Global Product Architecture.

Teets went on to say, “These records will enhance core WorldCat-based applications, including Open WorldCat. Between these records and the registry of OpenURL resolvers, Internet users will have broader access to the licensed electronic collections of libraries through the Open WorldCat program.”

Openly Informatics will also benefit from this new partnership, expanding its knowledgebase coverage to include electronic resources other than journal materials, such as ebooks and electronic theses and dissertations.

Teets indicated that the reaction of existing OCLC and Openly Informatics customers has been favorable. “We’re confident that as we move forward with our collaborative efforts, users will view this acquisition as a positive development for us all.”

OCLC PICA, the European library cooperative, also made a recent acquisition, purchasing Fretwell-Downing Informatics. Fretwell-Downing relies on the Openly Informatics knowledgebase for providing services, such as OpenURL linking, to its library customers. As Teets points out, the acquisition of Openly Informatics “ensures that Fretwell-Downing will continue to offer a high level of services based upon Openly’s expanding knowledgebase.”

Where Open WorldCat is Heading

OCLC has big plans for Open WorldCat, with several areas of expansion planned. Up to this point, Open WorldCat has relied on partners, like Google and Yahoo! Search, to provide a search form for Web users. According to Nilges, in the coming months OCLC plans to release a WorldCat search page from which users can launch their own search. Nilges went on to say, “Later this year and into 2007, we plan to incorporate some of the many innovations from our OCLC Office of Research in to Open WorldCat, including FictionFinder, DeweyBrowser: Fast and Audience Level.” (For more information on these new developments see http://www.oclc.org/research/researchworks/default.htm.) All of the recent and upcoming developments in Open WorldCat promise to increase library visibility on the Internet, offering new opportunities for libraries and their users.

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Against the Grain / February 2006