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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 in the spring of 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 how 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 on the OCLC Web site http://www.oclc.org/worldcat/open/how/default.htm.

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<http://www.against-the-grain.com>
OCLC version of the Yahoo! Search toolbar can be found at: [http://www.oclc.org/toolbar/default.htm](http://www.oclc.org/toolbar/default.htm).

Google has also enabled its toolbar to link to Open WorldCat records. In the latest version of the Google toolbar, the AutoLink feature will recognize ISBN's on a Web page. “When ISBNs are found, the AutoLink button on the Toolbar is retitled Show Book Info. Clicking the button highlights ISBNs on the page and converts them to hyperlinks to Open WorldCat information for each represented item.” ([http://www.oclc.org/worldcat/open/searchschools/default.htm](http://www.oclc.org/worldcat/open/searchschools/default.htm))

These toolbars are available for both Internet Explorer and Firefox.

**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 service of an OCLC member library.” ([http://www.oclc.org/worldcat/open/reference/default.htm](http://www.oclc.org/worldcat/open/reference/default.htm)) Currently, those libraries operating on OCLC’s QuestionPoint platform and almost 150 others 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](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/](http://www.btol.com/)) or Amazon ([http://www.amazon.com/](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 libraries. “Each time a book is purchased through the “Buy It Now” Baker & Taylor store, a portion of the proceeds is shared with Open WorldCat libraries through credits on their OCLC invoices.” ([http://www.oclc.org/worldcat/open/store/default.htm](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 in 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.

**For More Information**


OCLC PICA. [http://oclcpi.ca/](http://oclcpi.ca/)

Online purchasing pilot. [http://www.oclc.org/worldcat/open/store/default.htm](http://www.oclc.org/worldcat/open/store/default.htm)

Open WorldCat. [http://www.oclc.org/worldcat/open/default.htm](http://www.oclc.org/worldcat/open/default.htm)


User-contributed content pilot. [http://www.oclc.org/worldcat/open/usercontent/default.htm](http://www.oclc.org/worldcat/open/usercontent/default.htm)

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