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Trick-and-Treat at California State University, Northridge

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Out of the Box — Swets Charleston Conference Scholarship Essay Contest

Designing a Tool for e-Resource Collection Assessment

by Hana Levay (University of Washington) <levay@u.washington.edu>

One of my duties in my position as Information Resources Librarian at the **University of Washington** is to manage the usage statistics for our electronic resources. This is no small task, as the **University of Washington Libraries** subscribes to thousands of electronic journals and databases. These statistics are collected monthly and stored in dozens of separate spreadsheets. I am frequently called upon to supply special reports for a few select titles: all of the electronic journal usage statistics paid with a certain fund, for example; or annual statistics from the last several years for one of our databases.

When I started my position, usage statistics were mainly stored in various folders on a file server, and even printed out and stored in a filing cabinet. When I was given the management of these statistics, I decided they needed to be much more usable on demand by our selectors and fund managers. We began a subscription to **ScholarlyStats**, a service that streamlined some of our usage statistics collection for us. At the same time, our library was moving to a staff Intranet, so I took advantage of that transition to reorganize all of our usage statistics. I wrote up directions for how to use these pages, and added metadata so usage statistics could be found by simply searching for that resource name in the search field. I was gratified to hear many of our selectors say they were now finding statistics on their own.

Last spring, we began to prepare for a serials cancellation project due to budget constraints. I knew that, even as well organized as our usage statistics were now, it was still a ponderous chore to find the statistics for just those titles of interest. Also, I knew that selectors would need to pore over several different spreadsheets; fund information in one, usage statistics in another, and licensing information in yet another area. I saw a great need to simplify this process — for the sanity of our selectors as well as of the support staff providing the data!

At this point, I remembered something I had learned two years ago while still taking classes to earn my MLIS. We had reviewed **Microsoft's Access** database, and how it could be used to create queries, forms, and merge data streams. I asked around, but no one I spoke with had any **Access** experience. I was given permission to play around with it and see what I could do. At this point, I don't think there were a lot of expectations on me to create something with **Access**, but I had high hopes for myself.

With my old **Access** reference book in hand, I designed a database using several tables, and linked them together with relationships. After a few clunky versions, I hit upon a simple design, wondering why I hadn't seen it all along. Then I set to uploading all of the various spreadsheets we had, fund codes and titles on one, usage statistics on several others. I created a new

spreadsheet containing data I exported from our ERM system containing license terms, including cancellation restrictions, and uploaded that to my database. Since we subscribe to **ISI Impact Factor**, I uploaded those numbers to my database as well. Finally, I decided that usage statistics and **Impact Factor** don't tell the whole story, so turned to another project I had been working on: **Eigenfactor**.

Eigenfactor (<http://eigenfactor.org>) is a bibliometric tool that ranks journals not simply on citation counts but also looks at the citation network to see who is making the citations. **Eigenfactor** is a sort of "Google PageRank" for journals. The **Eigenfactor** project also happened to be developing in a biology lab just a few hundred yards from my own office. I had recently begun speaking with **Carl Bergstrom** and **Jevin West** about their work, and how we could collaborate on projects. They were excited to have a librarian join their team as well, so we were on good terms. So, I asked them for a data dump, which they happily supplied. I was able to upload their data into my database and easily match the **Eigenfactor** values to our electronic journal titles.

Once the database had everything uploaded, I designed a giant query to pull it all together, and now could easily create a spreadsheet containing all the relevant information. The problem then was that this spreadsheet was unmanageably large; too large to print and bring to a fund group

meeting. I consulted with a few people and designed a simple report that contained just the summary of all the relevant information that was the width of a single page. Then, if desired, the selector could refer to the complete spreadsheet for the rest of the information. This way, there was completeness as well as portability.

I ran reports for each fund group and posted them to the staff Intranet for easy download, and advertised their availability in several staff meetings, along with encouragement to let me know if they desired any special reports.

Fortunately, it turned out that we did not have to perform a serials cancellation project as our library was supplied with additional funding. A few selectors took the opportunity to review the reports I created to streamline their budgets anyway, since having all of the information right in front of them in one report made things much easier. I received many thanks and compliments on the project. Even though initially I was a little disappointed that my special project didn't get more widely used, I've learned that what I created is a valuable new tool. I have since had many discussions with other libraries on how they can create a similar tool, and have continued to receive interest to this day. I hope to continue developing this tool, adding more information such as cost per use for example, and to share my discoveries with other libraries in the hopes of my work helping more people. 🌱

Trick-and-Treat at California State University, Northridge

Helen Heinrich (Cataloging Coordinator, Oviatt Library, California State University, Northridge) <helen.heinrich@csun.edu>

California State University, Northridge (CSUN) is part of the **California State University** system, a 23-campus consortium. For its libraries, information technology solutions are introduced at the centralized, consortial level, thereby mandating the use of prescribed information tools system-wide. However, if there is no system-wide contract addressing a specific library need, campuses are free to decide on a vendor solution of their choice. This combination of the decision-making process (i.e., central and local) produces mixed results and sometimes creates a discordant e-tool environment for a particular library. CSUN encountered such a discord during its implementation of **MARC Update Service** from **Serials Solutions**.

In 2004, **California State University's** Chancellor's Office made a decision to implement system-wide **MetaLib** and **SFX** products from **Ex Libris**. The implementation of these integrated tools provided CSUN with federated searching, an OpenURL link resolver, and an A-Z list of electronic periodicals. The A-Z list

became the first and only gateway to the electronic journal collection and was highly valued by patrons, library reference services, collection development, and other departments. It quickly became a familiar and convenient resource for *title*, *keyword*, *subject*, and *ISSN* searches, as well as title browsing, of the library's online journals.

Recognizing the advantages of the catalog, such as the full-range of search indexes, ability to display earlier/later titles, title and format changes and other features, CSUN was convinced that integrating MARC records for e-journals into its online catalog would be an even greater service to the user. Since there was no contract mandating the use of a specific vendor for this purpose, after careful consideration CSUN decided to use **Serials Solutions' MARC Update Service**. Integrating e-journal MARC records from **Serials Solutions** into the library catalog provided instant access to almost 25,000 electronic journals. Soon thereafter, we noticed that **SFX** "missed" some journals and produced

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a message that there was no full-text access available although we had a record for the journal in the catalog indicating full access to the resource! The reason for this “behavior” was that the SFX link resolver and A-Z list were rooted in the **Ex Libris** knowledge-base, which at that time consisted of only 15,000 titles. With our 25,000 electronic journal titles, this meant that there was a 10,000-title gap between our resource discovery tools, MARC record service and the A-Z list. This also left reference librarians and users wondering why a journal displayed in the catalog was neither listed in the A-Z list nor found by the link resolver.

This presented us with a dilemma on two levels: 1) We did not want to provide a gateway to our collection that was inaccurate and non-representative of our collection; and 2) We did not want to switch to **Serials Solutions** A-Z list because this would present a change in the interface. This change might confuse our patrons, who were used to the customized **MetaLib** interface, consistent with our SFX link resolver.

Working with our Systems Administrator we found a creative solution to the problem of asynchronization between the A-Z journal title list and catalog-based access to the online journals. Instead of using a canned A-Z list from either **MetaLib** (which was inaccurate) or **Serials Solutions** (which presented a mishmash of interfaces), we decided to leverage the catalog. Retaining the shell of the customized **MetaLib** interface (see Figure 1), behind the scenes we redirected the queries on the page of **CSUN List of Electronic Periodicals** from the **MetaLib** A-Z list to instead searching the catalog by either *title*, *key word*, *subject* or *ISSN/e-ISSN*. The **MetaLib** interface had two basic sections: the first provided several different search types (*title*, *title keyword*, *subject*, and *ISSN*) with associated search boxes for the user to enter their search terms; the second was a *browse by title* option, with the alphabet represented in a table form at the bottom of the page. The inputs from the main search forms were all passed to a common **Javascript** function for processing prior to submission. This made it possible

Figure 1 — CSUN List of Electronic Periodicals

The original **MetaLib** interface (Aug.2005). Searches go to **MetaLib** A-Z list.

to switch from passing the inputs to the **MetaLib** e-journal list, to submitting them to the catalog. The *alphabetical browse* function was also relatively easy to replicate in the catalog by submitting a title browse search for the specific letter chosen by the user and limiting the search to electronic journals. Voila! The patron received accurate search results and the library a comprehensive listing of its electronic periodicals. Moreover, by redirecting the search to the catalog, the user gained the capability of drilling down into the database for expanded title and subject browsing. And to respect users’ habits and the integrity of the library’s Website, we retained the look

of the page as if the query went into the **MetaLib** knowledgebase (see Figure 2).

This solution is just one example of the “out of the box” thinking that takes place at the library of **California State University, Northridge**. I feel very fortunate to work in an environment where innovative thinking is a standard practice. As Cataloging Coordinator at **CSUN**, I know all too well that the best solutions come from collaboration and a flow of ideas. At a time when changes in information technology happen so rapidly and when it is paramount to be on the cutting edge for the benefit of our users, conferences play a significant role in disseminating fresh ideas, introducing new products, and providing forums for discussions and networking opportunities for librarians and vendors. 🍂

Figure 2 — CSUN List of Electronic Periodicals

Familiar interface but searches go to the catalog (May 2008)

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But I also think we are gradually ambling toward an OA scholarly communication paradigm which is not dependent upon page charges — but we are not there yet. To use a very crass analogy, paying publishers to provide for open access is like giving crack addicts methadone. The addicts are still addicted but to a controlled substance in the hope that they will find something more socially acceptable and sustainable to do with their lives while they are eased off their need for crack. In this case we are in the paying publishers article charges to ease them into the OA world — with perhaps the unspoken hope that they will, like **Google**, find a different way of getting the money they need with which to pay the bills, e.g., advertising or by making subscription based e-journals outshine their OA equivalents. 🍂

Endnotes

1. See **Answers.com**: <http://www.answers.com/topic/turning-point>.