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Using Google in Technical Services

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Using Google in Technical Services: An Unscientific Survey

by Carol H. Jewell (University of Albany) <cjewel@uamail.albany.edu>

Public Services librarians use Google daily. But how many Technical Services (TS) librarians use Google, and, more importantly, how do they use it? In a recent search of the current literature, I was able to find only two citations which addressed this question: Jennifer Lang, “Have You Searched Google Yet?” Using Google as a Discovery Tool for Cataloging, in Library Philosophy & Practice, Summer 2007, Vol. 9, Issue 3, p.1-10, and Jin Qiang, “Creating Up-To-Date Corporate Name Authority Records by Using Official Corporate Home Web Pages,” in Cataloging & Classification Quarterly, 2004, vol. 38, Issue 3/4, p.281-290. I often use Google in my cataloging work, as do some of my colleagues. I know that using Google has changed the way we do our jobs. I was curious to explore how our jobs have changed, because of Google, and the many ways in which librarians and other library staff in Technical Services use Google to inform and verify their work. I hoped I would learn how I could improve my own skills. I use the phrase “Technical Services” to include acquisitions, serials, cataloging and database maintenance.

I decided to conduct an informal survey. In February 2008, I posted the following query to acquisitions folks. Frequent use of Google Search Engine to verify live URLs was something else I expected.

I received answers from people working in all sorts of libraries: academic, private, school, public, art, music, law, scientific, church, federal, medical, military, etc., and a few answers came from book vendors. Most of the responses came from North America, and there were a few from other parts of the world, as well. I was surprised at the variety of answers I received. (I should probably have been more specific and asked how people use the Google Search Engine in particular, as some people told me how they use other Google products. More on that later.) Most respond-

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The Acquisitions Category:

Finding small-press Websites
Finding out currency exchanges
Subscription information; chronology; format change
To determine latest editions of titles
To determine release dates, especially for best sellers
To find alternate vendors
To find license agreement terms
To find non-book vendors (i.e., specialty film distributors)
To find open access journals
To find publishers Websites, to check frequency information
To find staff members’ names (on a journal Website) so that I can speak to an actual person and get an answer!
To find state agency field offices
To locate and price media
To search book values
To search for out-of-print material

Vendor: addresses, price, ordering information, phone number; saves money on long distance phone

Endnotes
4. Ibid., p. 104.
5. Hix, Timothy. ProfitSource, a subscription service.
8. Auletta, op. cit.: 33.
12. Ibid.
15. Hix, Timothy. ProfitSource, a subscription service.

For me, that word describes Google perfectly.

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15. Hix, Timothy. ProfitSource, a subscription service.
The Cataloging Category:

- To find award winning book information for a 586 field
- To determine contents notes for a 505 or 520
- To get definitions; to determine subjects and/or scope
- To determine if book is children’s or young adult in scope
- To find cover images
- To find book and film synopses in foreign languages (and occasionally using Google’s translation feature)
- For image searching, for cataloging visual materials
- To answer geographic queries (i.e., where is X located?)
- To find artist information for artists too current to be in reference books or OCLC
- To find association Webpages to get the name of a foreign association in the language of that association, to add cross-references
- To find author’s Websites
- To get info about actors and other film personnel, not found in IMDb
- For authority work, especially for living composers who often have their own Webpages, but may not be listed in standard reference works
- To find originals of reprints
- To find production dates of films
- Researching the history of a serial, especially government publications
- To find reviews of films
- For Subject Authority work, subject cataloging
- To check spelling
- To clarify 505 information in poetry collections, and anthologies on CD
- To determine a conference site
- To determine current titles of state agency officials
- To determine historical contexts of maps, for map cataloging
- To determine if an author is American or British (do I use PS or PR?)
- To determine statements of responsibility from manuscripts that have none
- To determine what genre of music a particular CD belongs to
- To establish dates for undated monographs
- To find dealer’s descriptions of antiquarian titles
- To find federal and state documents online
- To find Nobel Prize award information
- To find state government agency URLs
- To find summaries of plays
- To get the full names of journals when all I have is an abbreviation
- To get to a specific page of a website
- To locate county information for genealogy materials
- To research a subject so as to add keywords to a 520
- To see how other libraries have cataloged something
- To see if a government publication has been scanned onto the Web
- To track the origins of reprints
- To try to identify initials on the back of photographs (for digitizing projects)

The Other Category:

- To compile biographical and administrative histories related to the creators of archival material
- To find other library websites, when designing ours
- To find procedure manuals of other TS departments
- To find cheap[er] sources of supplies
- To find colleagues’ (at other institutions) email addresses
- To find documentation that I don’t have the URL for (i.e., RDA)
- To find policies and procedures from other libraries
- To learn about obscure points of cataloging
- To look up Unicode
- To search for foreign national libraries’ catalogs
- To search for research ideas
- To find translations
- To find transliterations

The use of Google is not limited to the search engine. People use Google in Technical Services to find transliterations, to find translations, to search for research ideas, to search for foreign national libraries’ catalogs, to find policies and procedures from other libraries, to find cheap[er] sources of supplies, to find colleagues’ (at other institutions) email addresses, to find documentation that I don’t have the URL for (i.e., RDA), to learn about obscure points of cataloging, to look up Unicode, to search for foreign national libraries’ catalogs, to search for research ideas, to find translations, to find transliterations.

The last item in the acquisitions category list pretty much covers everything that preceded it: prior to Google, it was often necessary to make numerous phone calls to ascertain the needed information.

In contrast, prior to Google, the items in the Cataloging category required many hours looking up information in print resources, and often fruitless searching in OCLC. (See Cataloging Category List, this page.)

The items in the other category ranged from designing Websites to writing procedures to finding sources for library supplies. (See Other Category List, below.)

There were two items in the acquisitions and cataloging categories, and they were: searching books that were not found in OCLC, and verifying URLs (and replacing dead links with live ones).

In analyzing the data, I found that the most frequent use of Google by catalogers was for authority work, classification queries, and URL verification. Acquisitions staff used Google most frequently for finding out publisher names, addresses, and phone numbers, URL verification, subscription information (including journal prices and chronology), and locating publishers’ Websites. The Google search engine is also heavily used by libraries which cannot afford to subscribe to online databases, such as ProQuest, Factiva, Lexis-Nexis, EbscoHost, and the like.

The use of Google is not limited to the search engine. People use the Google RSS Feed Reader, Gmail, Google Docs, Google Scholar, Google Calendars, Google Books, and the Google Desktop. As these
and other Google products continue to develop, the usage of Google by Technical Services may increase or decrease, depending on the assessed value of the product. Much remains to be seen. It would be interesting to conduct future surveys of this type to find out what other interesting and creative ways there are to use Google in Technical Services.

FeedYourPlayer.com. Reported in the Post & Courier (Charleston, SC), March 12, 2008, p.13B.

Talk about against the grain! Borders Group Inc. plans to reduce inventory in order to increase the number of titles it displays with the covers “face out.” Apparently, this is an approach that Wal-Mart has taken as well. I wonder if libraries should follow.

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Imperfect Tools: Google Scholar vs. Traditional Commercial Library Databases

by Julie Arendt (Morris Library, Southern Illinois University) <jarendt@lib.siu.edu>

Like every other resource that a library might offer, Google Scholar has strengths and limitations. Instead of rejecting Google Scholar because it does not do everything that the library or librarians do, Google Scholar should be accepted or rejected based on how well it assists in a particular step in information seeking. That step traditionally has been assisted by indexing and abstracting resources. In some circumstances Google Scholar is a better tool than the indexing and abstracting resources; in other circumstances it is not. This article examines the strengths and weaknesses of Google Scholar compared to subscription indexing and abstracting databases. It critiques college and university libraries’ continued use of subscription databases that fail to provide a clear advantage over Google Scholar.

When Google Scholar was introduced, it initially met with some praise and a fair amount of criticism from the library world. Both the praise and criticism generally were deserved. Unfortunately, early responses sometimes compared Google Scholar to the library as a whole or to an idealized vision of library databases’ rather than to the real, imperfect indexing and abstracting databases offered through the library. Some of the faults that early commentators found in Google Scholar included lack of a controlled vocabulary, lack of authority control, incomplete or uneven coverage depending on discipline, and time lags between publication and appearance in the database. These same faults could be pointed out for Web of Science, a venerable subscription database. Another criticism of Google Scholar was that its definition of “scholarly” includes materials that have not undergone peer review, so it may lead users to this unvetted material. Again, this criticism also could be leveled against a subscription database. For example, book reviews, editorials and commentaries regularly appear in search results from Academic Search Premier, even when the search is limited to scholarly (peer reviewed) journals. Instead of comparing Google Scholar to the ideal resource, a fairer comparison would be to actual subscription databases.

Some evaluations have explored whether a subscription database produces better results than Google Scholar. When librarians conduct test searches using advanced search features in library databases, they get somewhat better results with the database than with Google Scholar.4,5 When college students conduct the searches, the advantage for the subscription database evaporates. The sources students find from Google Scholar are as good as or better than those found through the library’s databases.6,7 For these novice users, often subscription databases do not provide a clear advantage over Google Scholar.

Librarians may be able to use controlled vocabularies to produce more precise results from a database than from Google Scholar or to find special materials that could not be found through Google Scholar, but library patrons are not librarians. Simply having a controlled vocabulary or special materials is not good enough for a novice user. If users cannot figure out the controlled vocabulary or find the special materials, they cannot experience these supposed advantages. For there to be a clear advantage of a subscription database over Google Scholar, novice users should be able to complete their work more easily with the subscription database than they can with Google Scholar. Many subscription databases provide a clear advantage by simplifying access to special materials or by leveraging their controlled vocabularies. The interface designs that highlight subject terms next to results sets, such as those in EBSCOhost and Engineering Village, should be commended for their effort to guide novices to controlled vocabularies without interrupting users’ searches. Some databases and interfaces simplify users’ work in other ways. For example, Web of Knowledge provides citation assistance through EndNote Web, and full-text resources like JSTOR provide easy access to complete documents.

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Carol H. Jewell

**BORN & LIVED:** Born in Brooklyn, NY, and lived in Chapel Hill, NC, and upstate New York.

**FAMILY:** Partnered with one daughter.

**PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES:** Cataloging, subject access, and disability issues.

**IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO:** Making and listening to music, laughing, and movies.

**FAVORITE BOOKS:** Anne of Green Gables and anything by Rumer Godden.

**PET PEEVES/WHAT MAKES ME MAD:** I hate it when people fail to use their turn signals!

**PHILOSOPHY:** “Inner beauty”

**MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT:** Earning my MLS while being a single parent, working full time, and not knowing how to drive!

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