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But I Checked the E-Journal List!

by **Abigail Bordeaux** (Electronic Resources Librarian, Binghamton University Libraries) <bordeaux@binghamton.edu>

Introduction

Ah, the good old days; **Rick Anderson** summed them up so eloquently in these pages a few months ago: "Nobody got hurt."¹ All of us who manage serials have anecdotes about how the Web has changed, and continues to change, our day-to-day work. We know that if managing print serials is like herding cats, managing online serials is like herding their fleas. We know that although staffing levels for print serials may have leveled or fallen off, positions associated with managing electronic resources have been on the increase for several years now. We have even grown familiar with the complexities and pitfalls that come our way at this time of year: grace periods that trick us into thinking our subscriptions have renewed correctly; panicked rush orders by librarians who failed to notice that online access no longer came free with print; attempts to configure new titles in our link resolvers, only to find that the vendor hasn't added them to the system yet.

But handling the important tasks of journal management can put us at some remove from the end users who rack up all those "Successful Full-Text Article Requests." Our patrons increasingly rely on the Web for their research needs. How have online publications changed their library experiences? And how are public service areas such as reference and interlibrary loan changing as a result of Web-based content? I took some time out from paying invoices and writing up **JSTOR** printing instructions to consult with my colleagues at **Binghamton University** about these questions.

Patron Experiences with Print

Before the Web became widely used as a full-text delivery platform, the workflows for getting articles were fairly limited. If you knew what you were looking for, you could check the card catalog or **OPAC** to find its location and then head to the stacks or current periodicals area. (If your library was lucky enough to have increased its storage space with compact shelving, you might approach the stacks with some trepidation.) If you weren't sure of exactly what you needed, you were likely to consult a librarian for help with the **Byzantine** print indexes, or to explain your needs to that librarian, who would then perform mediated searching and give you the results.

In almost every case you needed to be physically present in the library to retrieve your articles, although you might be able to do some of the preliminary work over the phone. Once libraries started developing Websites, you could sometimes gather infor-

mation remotely, but getting the goods still required getting in the car eventually. If the library didn't have what you needed, you could fill out a form to request items via interlibrary loan, a process that could take up to several weeks.

Content Goes Online

Now, of course, the situation is entirely different. Most, if not all, of the research process can be done while sitting on the couch watching **CSI**, although the quality of the work might suffer. Special libraries are the last bastions of mediated searching; many students would probably be surprised to learn that such a thing exists. Aggregated databases led the way in putting article content online and were generally the first sources for Web-based content at the library.

Content via the Web! Full-text articles online! You mean I don't have to write down the citation and then go look it up in the **OPAC**, and then walk up to the stacks or maybe put in an ILL request? I can just click this little button here and then... print away to my heart's content?

Aggregators simplified much of the research process, especially for our undergraduate students. They could come to the library or go to the computing lab (back before everyone had their own PC or PowerBook) and get a few articles in a few minutes. They were no longer bound by the hours and location of the physical library and they suddenly had access to titles to which the library didn't previously subscribe.

Perhaps those were the good old days: not the days when we had only print, but the days when patrons had anytime, anywhere access to some content, but not so much and from so many providers that they became overwhelmed. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Proliferation of Online Content

As publishers started offering individual titles online, in addition to or instead of through the aggregators, many print subscriptions began to include a "free" online component. Libraries that had full text through four or five databases suddenly found themselves with full text through dozens of providers. The Web environment, instead of sorting itself out over time, has become increasingly challenging for patrons to navigate. A quick check of our **Serials Solutions** files revealed that **Binghamton's** e-journal list has more than tripled (to over 30,000 titles) since we received our first report in June 2001.

There are many benefits to searching journal indexes online and many benefits to having the full text in an online format, but the

process of getting to full text continues to perplex and exasperate both librarians and patrons to the extent that patrons have been known to say, "Never mind, I'm sure I can just **Google** it." Sometimes citations must be captured in one database and then researched in another. A library's catalog may or may not contain records for each title to which the library has electronic access. Even if the titles are cataloged, the holdings may not be included—or, of course, they may have changed since the cataloging was completed.

Then there are the A-Z e-journal lists: helpful and necessary tools for quickly ascertaining the online availability of a title, but only if people (librarians and patrons alike) stop and actually read the holdings information. And e-journal lists need to be used in conjunction with the catalog unless the library has expanded such a list to include its print holdings. My spouse once dutifully checked a dozen citations against our e-journal list and submitted ILL requests for most of them, only to have his requests rejected because all the articles were available in print at the library. If someone who is married to an electronic resources librarian can't figure out what the library subscribes to, how is the average patron likely to fare?

We have given our patrons so much—more, in fact, than they may want or need. We have given them one title six different ways, but another title zero ways. And in order to figure out whether it's six or zero and which of the six is best for them, they must check an index, the catalog, and the e-journal list *and* they usually must follow links from each of these places before they can be sure of the answer. Link resolvers, so promising, attempt to put much of this complexity behind the scenes, to put most of this burden back on the librarians, and they often succeed. But they are subject to the same limitations as our catalogs and e-journal lists; when they aren't maintained to a high standard they can simply become another source of frustration on the quest for full text.

Print Still Exists, But Not for Everyone

What if the article just isn't online, either because the library has not licensed the content, or because the journal has not yet published in an online format? **Binghamton's** link resolver statistics for this academic year show that a full-text option appears on our

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menu of choices about 45% of the time. That means that over half of the time our patrons need to either check our catalog for print holdings (which should be suggested by the menu) or submit an interlibrary loan request (also suggested by the menu if no match is found in the catalog). Yet anecdotal evidence from reference librarians suggests that patrons expect full text online at a rate much higher than 45% and that if full text is not on the menu, they are likely to seek out a different source rather than take extra steps to obtain the article in print.

Online content has also increased expectations for interlibrary loan turnaround time. Our average delivery time for journal articles is about seven days — faster than it used to be, to be sure, but some patrons think it is worth \$25 not to wait a full week or more. Conversely, ILL requests continue to increase along with the increase in availability of full text, perhaps due to the growth of journal indexes and other reference tools online.

Conclusion

There are many developments that combine with the presence of full text online to impact our patrons' library experience: commercial search engine design, user interface design principles, and an increased pace of life are just a few things that affect patrons' expectations and assessment of libraries. I haven't even touched on the growth of the library Website, which has been driven by the availability of full text and with which librarian-developers continue to grapple. Our navigation and delivery systems haven't kept up with the content. Patrons don't want to go back to print, but they do want a simplified workflow for getting what they need. Once, in the print era, figuring out which articles they needed was the hard part, requiring mastery of complex print indexes and search as-

against the grain people profile

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BORN & LIVED: Born and raised in Cleveland Heights, OH. Lived in Bryn Mawr, PA for seven years before moving to Binghamton, NY in 1999.

EARLY LIFE: I'm an only child — and an only grandchild on one side of the family, so I was a little spoiled growing up! I was an avid reader and have lots of memories of borrowing books from the public library. In the summertime, we always stopped to get malts on the way home.

EDUCATION: BA in Russian from **Bryn Mawr College**, MS in Library and Information Science from **Drexel University**.

FIRST JOB: I worked as a summer day camp counselor at **Laurel School**, first with preschoolers and then with third-grade girls.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: My first library job was in Acquisitions while I was an undergraduate at **Bryn Mawr**. While in library school I worked in Special Collections digitizing vintage photographs and doing rare book cataloging. My first professional job was as a cataloger.

IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO: Read, listen to music, travel, sing, practice the kaval (Bulgarian flute).

FAVORITE BOOKS: Hard to pick... something by **Dostoevsky** would be on the list. Of the books I've read recently, *The Kite Runner* by **Khaled Hosseini** stands out. On the lighter side, I really enjoyed **Laurie King's** *Mary Russell Mysteries*.

MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: Managing the implementation of our metasearch tool.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: I'd like to get up the nerve to try hang-gliding.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: Who knows?! What I hope to see: intuitive, seamless user interfaces; much more integration of library content and services with our patrons' physical and virtual environments; substantial progress in the area of digital preservation. 🐼

sistance from professional librarians; now patrons can easily find citations that satisfy their needs, but the path from citation to article is sometimes, for the moment, a circuitous and rocky one. 🐼

Endnotes

1. **Rick Anderson**, "Tell Me One More Time: Why Is It We're Going Electronic?," *Against the Grain* 17, no. 6 (December 2005 - January 2006): 34-36.

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to the memory of long-standing editor **Ilene F. Rockman**, who died from non-smokers lung cancer on November 26, 2005. The first issue of 2006 (Vol. 34, No. 1) contains tributes to **Rockman**, along with the editorial she was composing during the final days of her life. As editor of *RSR* for over 20 years, **Rockman** was a tireless advocate for the library and information science profession and deeply respected by friends and colleagues. Additional tributes by **Emerald** will include: electronic distribution of the commemorative issue (Vol. 34 no. 1) during the month of April 2006. To access this issue go to [a/www.emeraldinsight.com/1009-7324](http://www.emeraldinsight.com/1009-7324) User Name:

Reference Password: Emerald. Hard copies will also be distributed at the **2006 ALA Annual Conference** in New Orleans, Louisiana. Several other awards and tributes have been announced. **Ilene** handed the editorship of *RSR* into the safe hands of **Eleanor Mitchell**, Director of Library Services, **Dickinson College**, and **Sarah Watstein**, Associate University Librarian for Research & Instructional Services, Charles E. Young Research Library, **UCLA**.
www.emeraldinsight.com

From *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 3, 2006 — "Ohio U. Says 37 Former Graduate Students Committed Plagiarism and Could Face a Range of Penalties," by **Thomas Bartlett** <thomas.bartlett@chronicle.com>. Apparently an investigation

at **Ohio University** spurred by a former graduate student, has established that 37 former engineering graduates plagiarized portions of their theses or dissertations. The penalty is "undecided."
chronicle.com/help/copyright.htm

Peter Suber just mailed the April issue of the **SPARC Open Access Newsletter**. This issue takes a close look at the new open access policy at Germany's **DFG (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft or German Research Foundation)**. The Top Stories section takes a brief look at the problem of **OA** to avian flu data, the campaign for **OA** to geodata in the UK, two **OA** presses from US universities, financial incentives at the **University of Minho** to fill its **OA** repository,

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