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Group Therapy: More on Google

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Group Therapy: More on Google

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GRIBE: Submitted anonymously

Why are librarians so upset about **Google**? I was recently at a meeting when **Google Scholar** had just been introduced and reference librarians, especially, were very upset that searching **Google Scholar** (and **Google** itself) gives many non-peer reviewed sites and frequently does not give a correct citation to the located item. It seems to me that **Google** is a great service used by many of our patrons (I use it all the time myself) and that librarians should be working with **Google** rather than against it. I am curious what other librarians think about this.

RESPONSE: Jeff Coghill (Electronic Resources & Collection Development Librarian, East Carolina University)

First things first, calm down, take a few deep breaths, relax, and breathe normally. I took a look at **Google Scholar** in Beta form on the Web. It's not all that impressive. Now, I am a fan of "regular **Google**" and have used it on many occasions when all else failed. It's just another tool I use, outside of the other resources that we pay for here at **Laupus Library, East Carolina University**. However, instead of seeing **Google Scholar** as a challenge to librarianship, we should look at it with a critical eye.

For one, the search results are not in date order, or any type of order, for that matter. There's no way to search for fulltext articles. You must have access to many subscription databases to make for a more meaningful search experience. It is a poor substitute for a **PubMed**, **Ovid** or **EBSCO** search in **Medline**—one search I performed was for "stress" and another was for "myocardial infarction." "Stress" returned 2.1 million results; "myocardial infarction" yielded 239K results—both search sets are far too many for one person to analyze. Another search for "Frankenstein" or "Frankenstein Mary Shelley Reviews" turned up a jumble of online books, Amazon ads, and course syllabi from various college and university English classes. Not even for a basic search, in either medicine or literature yielded anything earth shattering or worthwhile. Imagine a college freshman user doing a search for his term paper...**Google Scholar** was not useful. If I were a frustrated freshman scholar, a call to a local librarian on a reference desk would have been much, much more productive.

The lesson here? Instead of preparing for the sky to fall, I say this: contact **Google**. Offer your services to make **Google Scholar** a better search engine (if you can't beat 'em, join 'em). Tell about your searches and how useful/useless they may have been. Then, do what you do best—work hard to help your clients find the information they need. We should still educate our administrators and those not in the profes-

sion about our value as professionals that we bring to helping users in their search for knowledge. And that is just basic, sound librarianship.

RESPONSE: Adam Chandler (Information Technology Librarian, Cornell University Library)

Since receiving an invitation to write about a response from some librarians to the **Google Scholar** release, I've taken more of an interest in the details of their new service. The thrust of my comments will be about the service and not the reaction to it among librarians.

I begin by introducing **Peter Binkley's OpenURL** hack for the **Firefox** browser (<http://www.ualberta.ca/~pbinkley/gso/>). The idea behind **Peter's** work is to create an **OpenURL** hyperlink on the **Google Scholar** results page that points to a local link resolver. The extension scrapes the page for citation metadata then formats it into an **OpenURL** that the library user could then click on to retrieve content licensed by the library (most useful if accessing collections remotely). The likelihood that every user would switch to the **Firefox** browser and then install this extension is miniscule, but that's not what **Peter** is expecting anyway. **Peter** did this as a proof-of-concept, a demonstration of what we might ask of the **Google** staff: build a customizable link resolver button into **Google Scholar** service itself!

Peter's approach is similar to how **OCLC** has responded to the **Google** "threat". **OCLC** makes its **WorldCat** metadata available for **Google** to harvest, in a relationship they call **Open WorldCat** (<http://www.oclc.org/worldcat/open/default.htm>). This allows **Google** users to redirect to a page that lists holdings for a book title in a local (**OCLC** member) library. Through **Google**, many more people are becoming aware that they could go to their local library to find a copy of the book they seek.

Where might these kinds of innovations lead? A recent article in *Ariadne*, titled "Towards Library Groupware with Personalized Link Routing" may point the way towards how to pull users towards a new library service (<http://www.ariadne.ac.uk/issue40/chudnov/#3>). The idea is to offer a tool that would be a kind of souped-up link resolver interface, one the user could customize and integrate into their less "formal" activities, such as reading and responding to blogs. Read the article for the full picture.

Now, I feel compelled to comment on the reaction to the announcement by reference librarians. The official **Google Scholar** FAQ page says the following about **Google's** motivation for creating **Google Scholar**:

"We recognize the debt we owe to all those in academia whose work has made **Google** itself a reality and we hope to make **Google Scholar** as useful to this

community as possible. We believe everyone should have a chance to stand on the shoulders of giants" [<http://scholar.google.com/scholar/about.html#faq>].

In light of **Google's** stated motivation for the service — to give back to the academic community and allow more people to use academic literature — criticism of **Google Scholar** from librarians might strike some as reactionary and shrill. The question for me is this: within library staffs, where is innovation emerging? Is it emerging from reference librarians? I know this will offend some of my colleagues, but usually not. In fact, reference librarians may be the most cautious of all the functional groups in libraries today. As the examples above illustrate, the innovation in libraries tends to come from the technologists with the skills to experiment and implement ideas, like integrating something new, **Google Scholar**, into a library's existing framework; or from leaders with the vision to allocate the resources needed to test such possibilities. As **Alan Kay** once said, "The best way to predict the future is to invent it" (<http://www.lisarein.com/alankay/tour.html>).

RESPONSE: Tim Daniels (Digital Technologies Librarian, Georgia State University)

I have had this discussion with several librarians and there seem to be three issues involved: a real concern about the quality (and in some cases quantity) of information a searcher finds; the ever-present issue some librarians have with the image of the library profession; or a reluctance to accept the types of changes **Google** (and the Internet in general) is bringing to our profession.

The concern about the quality and quantity of information a searcher finds is a real one. Many libraries are involved with information literacy campaigns. Of course, in order for these campaigns to be successful, librarians must take the initiative and develop marketing and sales strategies to imbed not only information literacy modules, but the librarian as well, at the point of need. Also, librarians are realizing literacy is not enough and successful students need to be fluent in information — a combination of information literacy, information technology, and critical thinking skills.

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There seems to be a concern among some librarians that **Google** (or some other technology) will come in and replace the library. This opinion appears to be directly related to the continuing discussion of the image of the librarian. This discussion tends to go something like, "patron group X just doesn't respect or understand what great services librarians provide... poor us." This issue is really a marketing issue. Over the last several years the library as an institution has begun to do a good job of marketing services and the concept of the library as a place to gather and build community, but we really need to begin to focus on marketing the librarian as an individual.

It is true that **Google** and other technologies have changed the services our patrons need from us, and change, even good change, requires some psychological adjustment. Many change experts explain that whenever a change occurs people go through a series of emotional experiences that include a sense of loss and periods of doubt and discomfort before they begin to understand and integrate the change. Unfortunately, change experts also tell us that some people never make it past the doubt and discomfort stage, and these stages are where most people feel the greatest sense of fear, skepticism, and anger.

As front line professionals reference librarians deal with the impact of these issues on a

daily basis. So, while many were discussing the negative impact of **Google Scholar** others were working with technology services librarians to develop ways to integrate this new technology in the appropriate environments to provide the greatest level of service for library patrons.

RESPONSE: Gaylor Callahan (Interlibrary Loan Borrower, University of North Carolina at Greensboro)

Count me as a devoted fan of **Google**. I can certainly see why many librarians (and even more educators) worry about students who may take all Websites as gospel, but I find **Google** invaluable as a verification tool. As the borrower at **Jackson Library**, I send around 8,000-9,000 ILL requests every year. Many require only a simple **OCLC search**; for others, I may be able to consult a familiar academic database like **ERIC** or **Medline**. Often, however, when all my more traditional tools have failed to turn up the information I need to place an accurate request, I turn to **Google** and am rarely disappointed.

Here's a recent example. A faculty member submitted an article request and gave the journal title as "Research working group on cyclical rhythms and secular trends." I was fairly sure that was NOT a title and tried an **SSCI** search for the author. No luck. I went to the print version of **SSCI** and found a 1982 citation with identical bibliographic informa-

tion, but giving the journal title simply as "Review." Thinking that since I knew the volume and date I might be able to narrow down the number of **OCLC** hits, I tried it. Again, no luck. Time to **Google**. I entered the author's name, keywords from the article title, "review," and the publication date. Almost immediately, I found that the "Review" is in fact published by the **Fernand Braudel Center** at **SUNY-Binghamton**.

Google is also helpful when a request includes a difficult-to-decipher abbreviation. I got a request for an article from "Ichtyol. exp. freshwaters." Knowing that something was bound to be missing, I did a quick **Biosis** search for the authors but didn't find the right citation. Turning to **Google**, I again entered both authors' names and a few keywords from the article title. The journal title turned out to be "Ichthyological exploration of freshwaters," so the abbreviation was not only difficult but misspelled!

These are just a couple of times when **Google** has made me look good to my patrons and kept me from wasting time wandering down blind alleys. Is it infallible? Certainly not, but as we all know, neither are more "academic" databases. As far as I am concerned, **Google** exhibits all that is best about electronic applications for libraries: it's easy to use and it delivers the information. It's up to me to judge how best to use that information and I'm happy to have **Google** as a partner.