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that users take longer to find information they need via the discovery service, this is not corroborated by other usability studies that suggest the discovery service is easy to use, leads users to relevant content, and inspires users to use it again in the future as their starting place for research.²⁷ So what the University of Denver is finding is the discovery service provides an opportunity to increase engagement with users — and in turn increases the value of librarians that are impacting and engaged in the discovery tool. Think of it as a simple equation: 8 minutes of engagement with a librarian x 1,000 students = 8,000 minutes of librarian interaction with users that wasn’t possible before the discovery service. And as more users become familiar with using the discovery tool, it’s not a stretch to understand how it provides ways for libraries to scale services to help even more users.

As library discovery services continue to grow in popularity, those that are Software as a Service (SaaS)-based can begin to leverage volumes of data (Big Data). By analyzing the large aggregated set of anonymous data, providers can learn about how users interact with the discovery services to fuel continuous innovation. This innovation leads directly to the development of new features that further guide users and promote the value of the library. Combining data-driven analysis of user behavior with usability testing, discovery service providers can operate like other search engines by developing features and enhancements that are guaranteed to have an impact on improving the discovery experience.

Several data-driven features are in development or being refined to improve discovery services. One such development provides search suggestions based on global usage data, encouraging users to expand their queries for more topical precision. New recommendation panes and query expansion features bring user experience further in line with open Web tools. This search assistance provides topical background information for users who need additional guidance to get started with the research process or who may not always know the right keywords to use. The integration of scholar profiles into the discovery environment can help foster collaboration amongst researchers and provide librarians ways to support their institutions scholars. Other new features include expanded opportunities for librarians to provide custom recommendations to impact the discovery experience, as well as automating recommendations of library-generated research guides by matching subject specialists to topical queries and discipline-specific searches. While these types of features are not available from all discovery services, those that provide them offer libraries more opportunities to rethink services to better engage and serve users. For example, as research guides become more visible and more valuable via exposure in the discovery service, libraries may choose to invest more time in making them more topical and interactive.

Conclusions

Though probably obvious, it is important to note that not all discovery services will have the same features and functionality. Each service will have different ways of helping libraries meet users’ expectations, engage and connect with users, and promote the library’s value. At an ALA session in 2012, Cody Hanson made the observation after three years of investigating the challenges of discovery at his library that “the more I investigated the major discovery services the more I realized they are as different as they are similar.”²⁸ Hanson also noted that discovery services “are really not interchangeable in terms of not only coverage, but feature sets, architecture of the systems, and even the business nature/