Leveraging the Power of Aggregation to Achieve an Enhanced Research Environment

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Abstract

With advances in scholarly communication, the academic research world is becoming more global and collaborative. E-Science, for example, has introduced scientific projects on a whole new scale in terms of collaborative effort, the dissemination of information, technical infrastructure, and the amount of data that is generated. In this global environment, scholars' quest for information transcends borders; indeed, every research document, no matter where it was created, can be accessed globally and its impact can be felt widely.

Information providers publish a growing quantity of quality materials and disseminate them to institutions around the world. Institutions, for their part, are striving to offer and facilitate the searching of as many relevant information resources as can feasibly be provided to their users, given local resource constraints. Researchers, in turn, are faced with the challenge of searching in multiple, discrete information repositories or overcoming the limitations of metasearch systems, which are currently deployed in a large number of libraries. As a result, new services are emerging that are intended to help users in their research tasks.

An example of such services is vendors' provision of large aggregations of scholarly materials from diverse information providers, made possible through recent advances in technologies and the increasing willingness of most publishers to broaden access to their collections. Quick to embrace these aggregations, institutions have begun integrating them tightly with local library collections for the benefit of their users.

With this growing amount of accessible scholarly data, scholars are in need of new tools to help them home in on the information that they seek instead of wading through masses of materials. The recent introduction of faceted categorization assists in this task, helping users refine large result sets intuitively. Other useful tools for researchers are system-generated recommendations that are based on the search behavior of scholars who previously searched for similar materials (as on e-commerce sites that tell users that "customers who bought this item also bought…"). Because research today is conducted with no regard to geographic location or institutional affiliation, a recommender service of this kind becomes even more meaningful with the increase in the body of information upon which it relies.

This presentation will illustrate the power of aggregation in providing tools for today's researchers and will draw on library examples to do this.

Ms Jenny Walker is an independent consultant in the library and information marketplace. Prior to starting her consultancy practice in 2008 Walker held a number of roles with technology and content providers, including Executive Vice-President marketing at Credo Reference, Vice-President marketing at Ex Libris, and Director of Technology Product Management at SilverPlatter. She has a keen interest in the development and deployment of interoperability standards and currently serves on the NISO architecture committee. Walker is a frequent speaker at international forums and has written widely on a range of subjects. Her recent work – and her current interest - is the enhanced provision of discovery services for library users, looking at Web-scale indexing and discovery services and the mining of usage-based content to guide users to relevant materials.

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