Going to the Source for Information

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The Systems Librarian

Going to the Source for Information

Direct links to articles could change the face of the reference desk

This may well be the golden age of the Web. Just when we think we've totally spoiled our users, we give them something else that makes things even better. We were at the American Library Association conference in Washington, DC, this summer, and there was one trend among the vendors that caught my eye: direct links to articles and to journal runs.

Database providers used to require searchers to access articles by first going to the main screen, and then calling up the article. This meant that you could not set up any systematic links to articles in the commercial databases in your library screens. The locations that showed up at the top of the browser included session information that timed out—not a consistent link to the thing you were searching. However, this is changing with vendors such as UMI, Ovid Technologies, and Project Muse.

Eliminating the step of going to the initial screen and initiating a session seems pretty simple—you just save a keystroke. This also opens an awesome array of possibilities for creative systems librarians.

Electronic Course Reserves

First of all, it will allow librarians to spread out the work of those embattled people at the reserve desk. In the past, professors who wanted to assign course readings only had two real choices. First, they could have the readings photocopied and then sold to the students at the campus copy centers. Otherwise, the readings could be sent to the library where staff could copy them and check them out to students. Either way, professors would have to check for copyright clearance before assigning the reading. Electronic course reserves will allow for a third option that should make everybody happier. There will always be a need for a paper copy of a course reading in the library, but these electronic solutions will eliminate the need for multiple paper copies being manually checked out. Even the copyright issues are happy, because the link is covered in the site license to the vendor.

The students will be happier because they can get what they want, when they want it. An early leader in electronic course reserves was Harvard Law School. In a presentation at ALA in July, Melissa Shaffer, the head of information technology there, reported that they adopted a motto of "Full information at any time, from any place." They set up a template for professors to use in creating a course reserves Web page, and gave them ftp accounts so they could transfer their own data. She implied that the only problem with the service was its popularity—her office was swamped with requests from faculty members.

I checked with one of my college's business professors last week to see what he would think of putting his course readings online. He just said, "Wow!" In a few weeks, we'll find out what the students say. However, when we offer them access to course readings from their dorm rooms or even from home, we aren't tracing ourselves for a lot of complaints.

Linking Through MARC Records

Direct linking will also help catalogers who want to extend the possibilities of online catalogs. Using the 856 marc fields, some libraries are adding Web links at the end of records to allow users to go to the electronic version of a journal. The librarians at Dartmouth have started an ambitious project to index their online catalog that links to free Web journals for their own clientele. They were a beta test site for the new UMI SiteBuilder software, and they have also created links to some of the JSTOR journals that they pay for. It's well worth a visit at http://www.dartmouth.edu/~library/online.html. Once you are in the catalog, make a keyword search for "electronic journal" and you will get a rich selection of online journals. Many of them are free for the looking, and those are worth bookmarking.

Jennifer Merrill at Dartmouth told me that they hide the actual addresses of electronic journal issues in CGI scripts—this saves space on the MARC record.

The Outer Limits of Applications

The potential for creative use of this technology is being emphasized by UMI, as the company included SiteBuilder software with its new release of ProQuest Direct 2.0 this summer. This supplies templates for applications such as links to current tables of contents, course reserves, and even customized screens for searching ProQuest Direct. People there tell me that the options will include course reserves with unique passwords for remote patron verification, which are timed to expire at the end of a semester.

While I am always happy to get technology advances that make the library look good, I wonder where it will all end. Maybe we'll have artificial intelligence programs that take all of the data and write research papers. In his presentation at ALA, Steve Coffman, director of PTI, the Information Research and Rapid Information Delivery Service of the Los Angeles County Public Library, is using this kind of technology to produce a virtual library so complete that it will almost eliminate the need for human support. He said that there will always be a button to push to contact a librarian, but they will study that as a system error. I'm sure that virtual libraries can ever be that virtual, but I'll be interested to see what they produce.

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WLN Brings PMSC to the Web, Joins DRA to Form Library Intranet

WLN has announced the upcoming release of ACCESS PLUS, the new audiovisual database from Professional Media Service Corp. WebLN, a WL N site, will also offer the PMSC database of quality MARC records in a special hook-ups, sign-up, or software, records from the Professional Media Service Corp. WebLN, a searching service. Through conscientiously maintained access to a libraries-only electronic database, librarians will be able to access databases in your library screens.

The company now offers the power of a 32-bit Windows product, tailoring the Alexandria Executive built upon the strengths of the COMPanion built upon the strengths of the COMPanion system that includes all of the advanced features for periodicals, Web capabilities, and advanced bookings.

“Corporate libraries asked why the product wasn't available to special libraries. We looked into requirements necessary to offer an outstanding product to a new market, made required changes to the Windows automation system, and COMPanion now offers a product tailored to meet the demands of corporate, medical, law, and other special libraries,” said Patrick Hanse, director of sales and marketing at COMPanion Corporation.

Alexandria Executive is a comprehensive system that includes all of the standards for delivering services such as cataloging, circulation, and patron/item management. The system also offers advanced features for delivery and return times when scheduling items and also prints packing and delivery slips for media aides or drivers.

Alexandria Executive offers a full range of automation components in one comprehensive package. The system is 32-bit native with Full-MARC record compliance and multi-lingual capabilities.

COMPanion Corporation has announced the release of Alexandria Executive to the corporate and special library marketplace. The company now offers the power of a 32-bit Windows library automation system to special libraries seeking a simple, cost-effective system.

After strengthening its hold in the school library market with the release of Alexandria for Windows in April 1997, COMPanion is now sharing some of its focus with corporate and special libraries. COMPanion built upon the strengths of the corporate and special libraries. COMPanion built upon the strengths of the school Windows product, tailoring the package to meet the needs of libraries requiring a more specialized library system.

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