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Building a Bento Box: COCC's Federated Search

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Building a Bento Box COCC's Federated Search

Tamara Marnell, ILS & Discovery Librarian Central Oregon Community College March 2019



The Problem

- Library patrons expect all search interfaces to act like Google.
- However, academic information is siloed by vendors.
 - COCC has 134 subscription databases. Many students use Academic Search Premier and nothing else.
- Naive and even experienced researchers are likely to miss good sources.

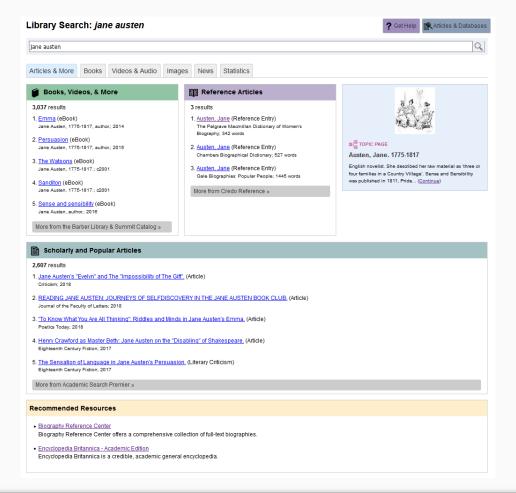
Potential Solution #1: The "One Search"

- Collect metadata from multiple vendors in one searchable index
 - o E.g., Ex Libris' Primo, Ebsco's Discovery Service
- Pros
 - Doable by librarians with existing ILSs
 - One algorithm with advanced search options
- Cons
 - Managing electronic inventory is laborious
 - Vendors don't play nice
 - Users see only one list of top-ranked results

Potential Solution #2: The Federated Search

- Deliver search results from multiple vendors in one interface
 - E.g., Ex Libris 'MetaLib, NCSU's QuickSearch, and more*
- Pros
 - O Directly tap into vendors' existing indices and algorithms
 - O Users can see a variety of resources at once
- Cons
 - Vendors' algorithms can be imperfect
 - Impossible to include every resource
 - Interface is busier

^{*} See more examples from prominent institutions in Emily Singley's 2016 blog post, "To Bento or Not to Bento"



Why Build from Scratch?

- Federated search products are expensive.
- The library has full control over the design.
 - Can promote specific resources to boost usage, like the CLERC collection at COCC

How It Works

- A user submits search terms through a form.
- The library's server uses <u>vendor APIs</u> to asynchronously query databases for those terms.
- The webpage displays results from the databases in "boxes."

Additional Features

- An autocomplete feature suggests search terms based on Wikipedia article titles.
- A "Did You Mean" feature from Ex Libris' Primo suggests potential corrections for misspellings.
- Librarians suggest "Recommended Resources" for keywords based on Library of Congress subject headings.

User Testing and Feedback

- A/B/C testing in Fall 2018 compared the federated search against the existing library website and Primo with articles (see <u>Federated Search Usability Testing Report</u>).
- Key conclusions:
 - The federated search guided students to find a wider variety of library resources.
 - Once students are in a search interface, they expect to find everything in the same place.
 - Spelling can be a significant barrier to success.
 - Students believe Google has all the answers.

Impact on Usage

- So far, there is no observable difference in the usage of included databases from Winter 2018 to Winter 2019.
- The biggest drivers of usage likely are and always will be instructors, not interfaces.

Questions?



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