Building a Bento Box: COCC’s Federated Search

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Building a Bento Box
COCO’s Federated Search

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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
  - 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**
  - Directly tap into vendors’ existing indices and algorithms
  - 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”
Library Search: Jane Austen

Books, Videos, & More
3,007 results
1. Emma (eBook)
   Jane Austen, 1775–1817, author, 2014
2. Persuasion (eBook)
   Jane Austen, 1775–1817, author, 2015
3. The Watsons (eBook)
   Jane Austen, 1775–1817, 1891
4. Sanditon (eBook)
   Jane Austen, 1775–1817, 1891
5. Sense and Sensibility (eBook)
   Jane Austen, author, 2010

Reference Articles
3 results
1. Austen, Jane (Reference Entry)
   The Penguin Biographical Dictionary of Authors
   Biography, 342 words
2. Austen, Jane (Reference Entry)
   Chambers Biographical Dictionary, 627 words
3. Austen, Jane (Reference Entry)
   Gale Biographies: Popular People, 1446 words

Scholarly and Popular Articles
2,607 results
1. Jane Austen: "Elton" and The "Impossibility of The Gift" (Article)
   Criticism, 2016
2. Reading Jane Austen: JOURNEYS OF SELF-DISCOVERY IN THE JANE AUSTEN BOOK CLUB (Article)
   Journal of the Faculty of Letters, 2016
3. "To Know What You Are All Thinking": Riddles and Words in Jane Austen's Emma (Article)
   Poetext Today, 2016
4. Henry Crawford as Master Bety: Jane Austen on the "Eliza" of Shakespeare (Article)
   Eighteenth Century Fiction, 2017
5. The Sensibility of Language in Jane Austen's Persuasion (Article)
   Literary Criticism
   Eighteenth Century Fiction, 2017

Recommended Resources
- Biography Reference Center
  Biography Reference Center offers a comprehensive collection of full-length biographies
- Encyclopedia Britannica - Academic Edition
  Encyclopedia Britannica is a credible, academic general encyclopedia
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 vendor APIs 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 [Federated Search Usability Testing Report](#)).
- 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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