

## Library Catalog and the Evolving User Expectations

As the keystone that supports the mission of libraries, the library catalog has always been an important focus of discussion. This is indeed because library catalog contained the majority of data, information and knowledge needed to do learning, teaching and scholarship — to save readers' time and advance the state of knowledge community. It is 'THE PLACE' that directly connects user and information.

The library catalog was the first service to support unmediated information discovery and access, and it has been doing so for over a hundred years long before wide use of information technology (Calhoun, 2006). Today, however, the world is different. Information resources are relatively abundant and user's expectations regarding search and access to information have changed. Users have many resources available to them and may not spend a very long time on any one. Many finding tools are available side by side on the Internet and large consolidated resources have appeared in the form of search engines, providing users with options, choices and alternatives (Dempsey, 2006).

The expansion of world wide web, widespread ownership of personal computers and rising computer literacy have created an era of tremendous challenges to libraries as information providers (Calhoun, 2006). More and more students as well as scholars are routinely bypassing library catalogs in favor of other discovery tools. A survey conducted by Online Computer Library Center or OCLC (De Rosa et al., 2005) showed that 84% of the respondents used web search engines to begin an information search vs only 1% on a library web site. A study of students in a Malaysian university library (Mohd Sharif and Zainab, 2007) found that 100% of the final year students used Internet as the source of information for their project because it was a quick way of getting information and it was convenient.

The limitation of library catalogs and the ease in searching of web resources have forced users to go "first to Google and other search services rather than to library catalogs" (Marcum, 2006). The popularity of the web appears to have influenced users' mental models and thus their expectations and behavior when using a web-based online catalog (Yu and Young, 2004). Online providers such as Amazon and Google have raised the bar for the delivery of information, and this has raised expectations for library services. Users expect that library catalogs to work as well as Amazon's web site, and that they will find as much relevant material through the library's home page as they seem to find through Google (Matheson and Davidson, 2007). As a result, the catalog has become a call-number lookup system, with resource discovery happening elsewhere (Zahiruddin and Syed Sajjad, 2007).

These discoveries came as no surprise as today's library without walls provides access over computer networks to a wide variety of resources, most of which are not represented in the library catalog. There are journal articles,

full text reference books, institutional repositories, digitised archives and curriculum materials. The materials that are available through the library are generally not part of the open access information sources that the user encounters through web search engines. Yet, those open access resources are also a valuable part of the user's information environment, and should not be seen, either by librarians or users, as rivals to library resources. The challenge today is to present all of this as a coherent whole and still help users make choices between the different offerings (Coyle, 2007).

This evolution is a matter of concern for libraries and they must act quickly to bring their users back to the library for their information needs. Coyle (2007) put it very well when she said, **"The question today is not how do we get users into the library, but how can we take the library to the users. The answer will necessarily involve a transformation of the library catalog."**

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