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ONLINE DATABASES

Keeping Up with Expectations

By Carol Tenopir

USER EXPECTATIONS ARE CHANGING, mainly owing to the web, search engines, and advances in communications technology. Libraries and information industry providers are taking steps, both large and small, to keep pace.

A recent cartoon in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* by Sidney Harris shows a twentysomething couple walking past a newsstand full of newspapers and print magazines. The man says to his companion with a puzzled look, "Beats me. It's yesterday's news, it's hard copy, and you have to pay for it" (8/4/06).

OCLC WorldCat.org

Expectations that information should be free are fed not only by the multitude of good web sites but also by the perception that library-provided resources cost nothing because they are freely available to library-affiliated users. OCLC took a big step to cater to all users by making the full 70 million-record WorldCat database available on the open web. Small portions of WorldCat have been available for nearly two years through search engines such as Yahoo! and Google.

WorldCat.org can be searched directly, or the search box can be embedded into web sites. Users can then search the database by title, subject, or person. The results list features an icon to depict the type of material found (books, videos, audio CDs, etc.). Although these icons are shown right below the search box, the beta version doesn't let users restrict searches by clicking on the icon. Non-clickable groups of icons definitely do not meet expectations.

Users are given a list of refinement possibilities displayed to the left of the search results. This list does include type of materials and tells how many in the initial search are of each type. In addition, the results screen offers other clusters of refinements drawn from the records of the retrieved items, including author, content (subject), language, and date.

Of course, WorldCat is just a bibliographic database, and a user still has to go to the library to get the actual items. WorldCat helps users find the closest of the 10,000 participating OCLC libraries that hold any item selected. Sometimes this works better than others—entering a Southern California zip code to find a cat mystery tells me that my hometown library holds a copy. This may just be the motivation I need to make a visit. The same zip code for one of the film records directs me to libraries in Wisconsin and Anchorage, AK—each approximately 2000 miles away!

WorldCat users may wish they had full-text links to ebooks since Google is linking to WorldCat from Book Search.

people or companies, as Wilson maintains comprehensive authority files. Wilson uses the example of "karimazov," where the system recommends "karamazov." This feature is particularly useful for searchers whose first language is not English.

When searching for "foilage," the system replies, "Did you mean: foliage in the search above? If yes, please click this link or review the spelling." Clicking on the linked correct spelling initiates a new search and uses words in all the records to suggest alternative other spellings.

Keeping current

Many systems are meeting expectations about currency by adding RSS feeds to their search services for news or

Meeting expectations is a treadmill turned on high speed—we have to run hard to keep up

Expectations are growing for immediate online multimedia materials as well. Although directing people to our physical libraries is a wonderful service, growing expectations may demand more immediate gratification.

Spell Checker

Web search engine features, particularly from Google, set expectations for search features as well as access. Although spell-checking is not a new idea, and LexisNexis introduced it over a decade ago, few other library search systems help users with spelling. This summer, H.W. Wilson introduced spell-checking to WilsonWeb, with many other enhancements. It uses both Wilson's extensive controlled vocabularies, which include many cross references, and free-text words from the database records (www.hwwilson.com).

WilsonWeb Spell Checker automatically suggests alternatives for any word or name that returns no hits when searching any of the WilsonWeb databases. It is especially recommended for names of

hot subjects. But beyond breaking news, easy access to comprehensive information on current events is important for teachers and students. WilsonWeb also added a new database in September with current events in mind. Like other current events services, "Current Issues: Reference Shelf Plus" provides key selected articles on specific hot topics. To keep it really current, users can run predetermined searches on WilsonWeb or the Internet. This combination of editorially selected best articles on important topics, plus the ability to get updates easily from a good search strategy, will help meet the expectations of both teachers and students.

Meeting expectations is a treadmill turned on high speed—publishers and librarians have to run hard just to keep up. Free and easy and powerful, the challenge to keep current is always a step ahead.

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