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Running with the Amazons

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Running with the Amazons

WHY HAVEN'T LIBRARY SYSTEM and information database designers included as many user-friendly features as Amazon and Google? This question, posed at the recent annual meeting of the American Society for Information Science & Technology (ASIST), was answered by UCLA professor Marcia Bates, who said that from 20 years of research we know what should be included, but we've never had the money to implement fancy search features. Now, we have a lot of catching up to do.

Amazon goes inside the book

Just after the ASIST meeting, Amazon.com introduced "Search Inside the Book," letting users search for words in the full texts of about 120,000 new books, along with author and title searches. Librarians have long dreamed about searching beyond subject headings and other basic bibliographic information. For libraries with e-books and e-book collections—like netLibrary and Knovel—full-text searching is typically not integrated with the online catalog but remains a separate operation.

Amazon's book searching can be done from the main page. It's just straight word and phrase searching, which may be just what the average user needs to locate a book to read. Terms entered within quotation marks are searched as an adjacent phrase, those without are searched with an AND.

Click on "books," then the "search" tab, and more powerful search features are available. Besides field searching by language, dates, format, and age of reader, under "Power Search" you can use Boolean searching, including AND, OR, and NOT and nesting. The searches can get pretty complicated.



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E-books vendors, like netLibrary, Knovel, and ebrary, offer more powerful full-text searching, including searching within chapters, paragraphs, and graphics. This allows books to become reference sources and databases in themselves, rather than offering just the enhanced finding tool that is Amazon's goal. Some also allow significant enhancements, such as the ability to link to other online reference sources, like encyclopedias.

After all, Amazon exists to sell books. When a user implements a search within a book, only the pages where the search words appear are displayed. Reg-

OCLC is working to tie library cataloging and holdings in with both booksellers—although not Amazon—and Google

istered Amazon customers can go directly to the pages from the brief display, but even registered users can only browse two pages before and after the selected text. Users can, however, view other places in the book where the term appears, or search for new terms in the same book.

Readers' advisory

Readers' advisory librarians have long wished for the other features that Amazon already offers. Searching Amazon for books by Patricia Cornwell, for example, tells me that her readers also enjoy Kathy Reichs, James Patterson, and Sue Grafton and that I might be interested in the new nonfiction book by the noted forensic anthropologist William Bass. I am given the option to search for books on the same subjects, read reviews submitted by other readers, comment on those reviews, read reviews from sources like *Publishers Weekly*, and see synopses of this book and related books.

None of these advisory, interactive

services are new ideas (public librarians do all of these things in person), but it didn't take Amazon long to implement them and readers to embrace them. Libraries haven't had the time or money to implement these services online. Now the best solution, for public librarians at least, may be to link from their catalogs to Amazon to take advantage of all of Amazon's good implementation.

Joining up with Google

OCLC is working to tie library cataloging and holdings in with both booksellers—although not Amazon—and Google. Bookselling sites such as ABE, Alibris, Bookpage.com, and others now include OCLC WorldCat cataloging records with library holdings information. These sites send users to the library if the book they want is not available for sale. Bookpage.com goes one step further: a "find it at the library" option.

OCLC also recently announced that two million of the OCLC shared cataloging records are now available through Google. When a WorldCat record is retrieved in a Google search and selected, users will be asked to provide a postal code or country name so the system can create links to the nearest library with holdings. Users will be linked to the library's catalog and other information to help them borrow the book (including a map with driving instructions). This is just a pilot—OCLC will evaluate and decide on its future in June 2004.

Gale is also working with Google, but from the other direction. Users of Gale's InfoTrac databases will now be able to link to Google's image search feature (the SafeSearch filtered version) to find images when an InfoTrac user clicks on the image link. This link to Google is only for image searching; Gale will not run the risk of linking to Google text searches.

It is ironic that our users look to these new commercial web systems as the model for good design, while library systems seem lacking by comparison. Now we must catch up. Either emulating or joining with the big guys may be the only way finally to make this possible.