

Delivering content at the point of need for the online user

In a world where users want to view only the content that most directly relates to their research requirements, OCLC has undertaken a major initiative to better connect library audiences globally with the content libraries license for them. Beginning in April 2007, over 57 million article citations have been added to WorldCat from NLM, ERIC, GPO, the British Library and the ArticleFirst® databases. This action reflects the need to connect users with the content licensed for them where users are working – web destinations such as search engines, Facebook, Google Book Search, Google Scholar or Yahoo! Search. Continuing this effort to enrich the search experience of WorldCat users and improve the discoverability of this authoritative content means addressing the challenge of increasing its visibility to these users where they are working, whilst protecting the Intellectual Property Rights of content providers.



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Among the most pressing questions for information publishers today are:

1. What kind of content does our audience want?
2. Is our organization set up to deliver that content?
3. How can we effectively deliver access to that content in a way that is easy for information seekers?
4. How can we help users discover the content we have to offer them using the Internet without undermining existing business models?

This article focuses on OCLC's work to directly address the fourth point: the challenge inherent in using the web to connect library audiences globally with the content libraries license from publishers in a way that makes sound business sense.

Background

To understand the initiative, it is necessary to look at the changes in behaviour and expectations of the typical web and library user over the last few years.

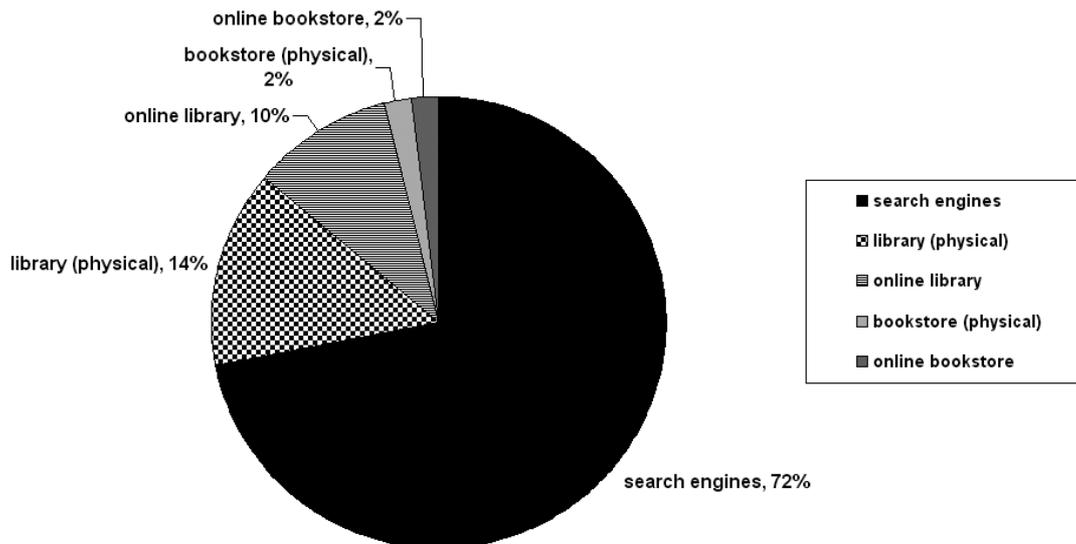
The genesis of the debate regarding whether students really had any understanding of the difference, and value of, authoritative content compared

to information gathered from a search engine inquiry came to the fore quite clearly for OCLC as results were analyzed from the *2005 Perceptions Report subset; College Students' Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources*¹. Among the insights in this report is the establishment of a baseline understanding regarding student use of key Internet tools such as e-mail, blogs and search engines.

In 2005, the baseline work illustrated significant use of e-mail (73%), search engines (71%) and blogs (16%) among college students. Just 18 months later, updated survey results indicated a near-saturation level of e-mail (97%) and search engine (93%) usage with a significant increase in the use of blogs (from 16% to 45%).

However, this report also recognized a very noticeable and disturbing downward trend in the usage of library websites from 30% in 2005 to 20% just 18 months later.

The impact of these trends for authoritative content publishers is even more striking when we look at how students responded to a query regarding their first choice for information sources. Over 70% of college students go to search engines first (see Figure 1) and 52% never make it from the search engine results to a library website! Of those who do reach a library website and use it, only 27% find the site useful.



source: oclc perceptions report 2006 <http://oclc.org/reports>

Figure 1. First choice for information sources by college students

The findings suggest that the traditional view that libraries provide effective delivery of authoritative content to users is increasingly being challenged. The role of libraries could be undermined completely by the increasing reliance users have on the unmediated web unless database publishers and libraries take steps together to get authoritative content resources into library users’ everyday workflow in a timely, effective and meaningful way.

These results also signalled several other realities confronting both libraries and content producers today as both seek to continue to offer relevant services. These trends include:

- libraries are moving from walled to wired environments
- library users want answers – articles, images, sound, video – immediately
- technology is presenting content producers with great opportunities and frightening business models
- content producers must think more globally
- many library users are not seeing or understanding the value of authoritative content.

OCLC is a non-profit member organization that has a stated mission to further access to the world’s information and to reduce the rising rate of library costs. The OCLC library co-operative is global and has over 69,000 libraries from 112 countries participating. Its strategy for assisting libraries and

content producers to overcome the threats posed above can be simply stated as the desire to *deliver information to libraries and library users at their point of need*. There are several examples of how OCLC plans to achieve this, none more so than its work on the ‘open web’ with the WorldCat.org initiative, which will be discussed later in this article.

Becoming part of the user’s workflow

The 2005 report signalled a time for libraries to synchronize the global reality of how people use the Internet with their mission to deliver information to library users at their point of need.

As search engine usage became a part of the workflow of library users, libraries needed to find a way to work with the major search engines to put themselves back in the flow. Despite some notable examples of large research libraries working with Google to digitize their collections, the vast majority of the world’s libraries fell beneath the radar of search companies.

OCLC started working with major search engines including Google and Yahoo! to include WorldCat database content as part of their search results. Through these partnerships, OCLC provided access initially to a subset of WorldCat records, and eventually to the entire WorldCat database. As search engine partners indexed WorldCat records, the results included links to

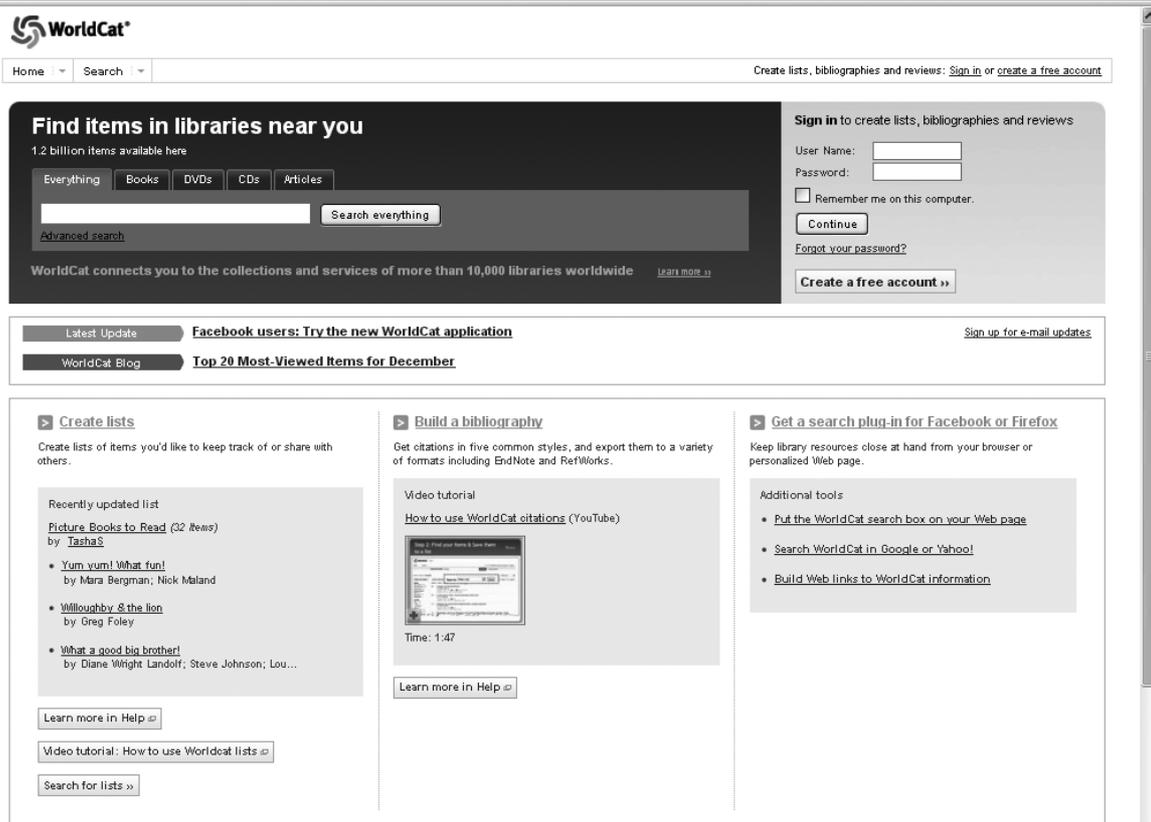


Figure 2.

library ownership information. The integration of information about library resources into search engine results made them more easily discoverable by those users who started their search on the web.

OCLC further expanded access to library resources on the open web with the 2006 release of WorldCat.org, a web destination site for the discovery of library collections and services. WorldCat.org provides public access to information about the collections of more than 11,000 libraries worldwide. The site was developed with library users in mind, and ongoing enhancements reflect input from this audience in the main as well as librarians.

Part of the WorldCat.org initiative to increase the visibility of library resources on the open web was the creation of an affiliate program through which OCLC provided a downloadable search box that institutions and libraries could place on their websites to enable their users to search WorldCat from familiar web locations.

The objective was to make library collections and materials available to users of the open web, i.e. search engines and smaller sites, and to begin to get into the workflow of web usage. The affiliate

program has been successful, with over 6,000 institutions to date registered for the download of the search box for placement on affiliate web pages.

An aggregated web presence for libraries

Many searchers are attracted to WorldCat.org because it is a gateway to resources in the world's libraries. Features such as the single search box, faceted browsing, relevancy ranking and citation formatting contribute to their comfort when using the service. Evaluative content such as reviews and ratings and book covers help people determine which items will be of the most use for them. In addition, many find that the social tools integrated into WorldCat.org create a compelling user environment to which they return frequently. With personal profiles, user-contributed reviews and ratings and personal lists, WorldCat.org has developed a growing population of dedicated, frequent users.

For many web users, immediate gratification is the key to a great experience. OCLC added geographical IP recognition to WorldCat.org to

enable the location of the WorldCat.org visitor to be recognized and to provide recommendations regarding which libraries are closest to their location and actually hold the material they are seeking.

On average, 2 million unique visitors use WorldCat.org each month, conducting searches that generate over 13 million page views. Roughly half (50%) of the time that pages are viewed, the user opts to link to the full record for more information, indicating that they are beginning to find what they seek. Those full record page views account for approximately 750,000 click-throughs (>12% 13 million pages viewed) monthly for local library services such as a library catalogue, an OpenURL resolver or an Ask-a-Librarian service.

Positive customer response and site traffic numbers have fuelled two additional and significant actions.

In 2007, OCLC introduced the WorldCat Local service, providing a customized view of WorldCat.org for individual libraries and library groups. Simply put, it enables a single search of a library's physical and digital collections to be conducted from a simple easy-to-use web interface with the option to also see resources available within a library group or in all WorldCat libraries. The infrastructure that supports WorldCat Local is shared by all participating libraries at the network level, eliminating the need for costly local investments in hardware, software or staff.

WorldCat Local was introduced at the University of Washington in April 2008². Since then, a growing number of libraries have implemented the service to increase web visibility and access to their resources. Other libraries using the service include the University of California system, Ohio State University, the University of Delaware and the State Library of Ohio.

Monographs and articles in one search

A significant enhancement to WorldCat.org was the addition of over 30 million article-level records to the WorldCat database that addressed users' interest in locating journal articles as well as monographs. Initially, high-profile, easily licensed and widely used databases such as the NLM MEDLINE file, the US Department of Education's ERIC file, the OCLC ArticleFirst database and the US Government Printing Office's records were

added to the WorldCat.org site for free public access. Subsequently, in early 2008, an additional 20 million article-level records were licensed and added for general use by WorldCat.org visitors from the British Library. The integration of article-level data with records that represent other types of library-provided content simplifies the user experience and expands the resources they can access via WorldCat.org.

In response to positive user feedback about the inclusion of article-level records, OCLC plans to increase access to this type of content through WorldCat.org. A project is now under way to enable discovery of content from the most frequently licensed collections within academic and public libraries through the service. OCLC is currently in discussion with several hundred database publishers, hosts and metadata aggregators to acquire access to the metadata that represents the content of their databases. The goal is to include the metadata in WorldCat.org and utilize both it and WorldCat Local to make the content more easily discoverable by users of libraries that license this content from a producer, host or aggregator. This multi-year project will over time consolidate access to a large quantity of authoritative content through a simple, accessible interface.

OCLC also has agreements with Bowker, the British Library, Elsevier, the Modern Language Association (MLA) and H W Wilson, and will announce additional partners as they are added. These organizations will allow OCLC to index their article-level metadata in WorldCat.org to make it discoverable by WorldCat Local users when a library maintains a subscription to that database.

This approach ensures the ongoing security of content provider business models. Libraries still license databases directly from database publishers, hosts or aggregators and WorldCat host/vendor or database publisher, whilst WorldCat Local and WorldCat.org provide increased access to this content. Only authenticated users at libraries that maintain such a subscription can discover this content in their WorldCat.org or WorldCat Local search.

The benefits of OCLC's approach

There are significant benefits to this approach for libraries, users and database producers.

For libraries and library users:

- it enables their users easily to search and discover the content hidden within many more of the collections the libraries have acquired for their use
- it is another step in getting libraries into the workflow of their users. Those who believe everything starts with a search engine may now begin to see that they can get relevant information if they use the library resources
- ultimately, libraries can get more usage out of the databases they license, and they become more cost-effective to continue
- use of library resources can rise significantly. For example, the University of Washington experienced a 70% increase in consortial borrowing during the initial six-month rollout period in late 2007 with a concurrent 100% increase in inter-library loan requests executed in WorldCat. The result for libraries is that library collections are better exposed and those resources are being used.

For database publishers

- representing the content of their databases in WorldCat.org for authenticated WorldCat Local users broadens the discoverability of their content within libraries that license it
- increased usage of the publisher's database by a library increases the likelihood of a subscription renewal because more value is derived by the licensee
- the potential for new revenue also exists if database publishers offer full-text content and have an e-commerce solution.

Should other hosts/vendors of these databases worry about this effort from OCLC? The user interface for WorldCat.org and WorldCat Local is designed to be as simple and as easy to use as any major search engine. It will provide fundamental access to search a database but not provide use of the more powerful search tools that librarians and information professionals expect in searching the database directly.

However, it is successful in driving usage which is evident at the University of Washington when, shortly after installation, WorldCat Local became the second highest source of traffic for full-text articles, with Web of Science being first.

Next steps

Two other significant events will take place in the summer of 2009.

Firstly, in July, OCLC will integrate access to multiple OCLC eContent formats (FirstSearch databases, Electronic Collections Online eJournals, NetLibrary eBooks and eAudiobooks, ArchiveGrid and CAMIO digital collections) through the popular WorldCat.org interface.

The delivery of eContent access through the WorldCat.org interface will simplify information retrieval for users by bringing together relevant content irrespective of format into a single result set. Links to library ownership information for items of interest will continue to be available as they are in FirstSearch, with the added benefit of local control over linking details for the library catalogue and OpenURL resolver through the WorldCat Registry.

Secondly, a metasearch feature will also become available in WorldCat Local. This new feature will enable a search of the article-level citations indexed in WorldCat.org for which the library has a subscription and execute a federated search of those collections that are not indexed in WorldCat.org.

OCLC is in constant discussions with content providers to realize the objectives described in this article and they welcome any opportunities to commence discussions with new publishers. Inquiries should be addressed to uk@oclc.org.

References

1. OCLC, *Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources*. A Report to the OCLC Membership, 2005.
2. For a review of WorldCat Local at the University of Washington by Steve Shadle, see *Serials*, 2008, 21(3), 226–228; doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1629/21224>

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