Federated Searching: What Is It and How Can It Be Used in My Library?

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Federated Searching

- Definition
- How it works
- Who offers it
- Uses and benefits
- Issues and problems
- Suggestions
Definition

Simultaneous search of multiple remote resources

- Includes library catalogs, commercial databases, Web search engines, and other metadata or digital databases

- Phrase from Open Archive Initiative’s Protocol for Metadata Harvesting (OAI-PMH)
Definition (continued)

Also called:

- Broadcast
- Consolidated
- Distributed
- Portal

Parallel
Cross-database
Integrated
Meta

...searching
How It Works

- Federated search engine, using a specific search protocol, gathers information and provides one search result to the patron.
- Vendor provides de-duping (removal of duplicate records) and sorting.
Protocols used:

- Z39.50 International Next Generation (ZING)
- SOAP (Simple Object Access Protocol)
- Z39.50 & XML
Vendors

- **Webfeat**
  - Original federated search engine
  - Can be used with standard link resolvers, like ICate and SFX, to link WebFeat citations to e-articles in the library’s collection
  - Provides real-time usage statistics
Vendors (continued)

- **MuseGlobal’s MuseSearch**
  - Sells exclusively through existing channels via vendor partners (e.g., Endeavor, Innovation Interfaces, Sirsi)
  - Provides personal WorkRoom for managing results and integrating them into reports, papers, lesson plans, etc.
  - Provides automated information alert service
Vendors (continued)

- Fretwell-Downing’s ZPORTAL
- California Digital Library Searchlight
- SIRSI Rooms
- TDNet
- Surfwax
- Ex Libris’ MetaLib
- Follett Find-It-All
- Sagebrush Pinpoint
Vendors (continued)

Check websites of each vendor for specific features:
Webfeat: www.webfeat.org/prism.html
MuseSearch: www.museglobal.com/Products/
ZPortal: xxx.fdusa.com/products/zportal.html
MetaLib: www.exlibris-usa.com/metalib.htm
Users and Benefits

- Users/Patrons
  - Reduces time
  - More efficient access to resources
  - Common Interface-consistent look/feel
  - Encourages users to search deeper & use other resources
  - Users expect this kind of service
Uses and Benefits (continued)

- **Library**
  - Allows library to create tailored portals
  - Higher return on investment of subscription resources
- **Higher Use**
- **Cost justification**
  - User Instruction-easier because of fewer interfaces
  - May integrate with link resolvers
Issues and Problems

Access/Authentication
- IP Authentication or login/password

Copyright/Branding

Cost-Initial setup and customizing in a consortia setting

De-duplicating

Two problems
1) How to define a duplicate
2) True de-dup is time consuming
Issues and Problems (continued)

- Interface - think Google
- Searching Capabilities -
  - Does it use native searching
  - Does it allow advanced searching
  - How many resources would be allowed in one search
  - What about response time if searching all resources
Issues and Problems (continued)

- Implementation - staff time involved
- Linking to OPAC
- User Instruction
- Relevancy ranking - how is this determined
- Server - who is hosting?
- Usage/Monitoring - could extra traffic equal extra cost
Suggestions

- Be Cautious and Do your homework
- Keep in mind that many vendors are still creating Federated Searching products
- LALINC Research and Development Committee is reviewing Federated Searching products


(Letter to the Editor.)

(Article later attributed to Webfeat, Inc.)

