

Deploying the Next-Generation Service

Abstract

Implementing a new service in a library requires a clear plan and strong communication inside and outside of the library. From developing a committee of staff members responsible for the implementation to creating a marketing plan for informing future users, there are many areas of the process that need to be well planned for success. This chapter will review this process and illustrate some examples.

Overcoming Librarian Anxieties

Deploying a new component in the library is like the Tuckman's stages of group development, where the group goes through four stages: forming, storming, norming, and performing. The first stage, forming, is where the library forms its new solution by rolling the solution out to the library. In many cases, this rollout process is a slower, planned-out process—not just ripping the Band-Aid off. Libraries tend to first deploy the solution to the staff of the library for evaluation, followed by a beta deployment, where the traditional system is the main search solution, but users have access to the new solution to allow them to beta test the product and provide their feedback. Finally, the solution is put in place, and the old solution is either retired or reduced to a link for access. Generally, once the solution is out of beta testing and in full production, the library enters the storming phase. This phase is met with anxiety. During this time, bugs or missing elements may be found that were not uncovered during the beta testing phase. Additionally, changing the core search tool can be very unsettling to a library where instruction and research have been done for

many years around a system that looks and acts differently. The NGC introduces a shift in the research process, which can cause a bit of anxiety. However, through adoption and use, the storming process calms and the library moves to the norming stage. This is when bugs and enhancements are worked out, bibliographic instruction has been modified, and users and staff have become comfortable with the end result. The final stage, performing, has been happening over a number of years. The product has been evolving, and the users have become experts. Many libraries with NGCs could not envision going back to the traditional OPAC after a year of steady use of the NGC solution.

Library Website Redesign

A fundamental shift in focus and priority that the NGC helped bring to the library was in the use of the library website—the online branch. The model for discovery and access suddenly became a core focus once the NGC was introduced to the library. Many libraries clearly understood the value of a welcoming, relevant homepage with highly functional information architecture that was the virtual front door to the library and its collections. Because the Millennial Generation views the library in much different ways from past generations, the need for a new homepage with a different approach to design and layout became very clear. Libraries began to look at the competition—not the institution next door, but commercial entities. Learning from the research and development done in the commercial market has taught these libraries how to better meet users' expectations. Models developed by popular websites have become the goal for the redesign process. A highly common practice is a tabbed approach to the central



Figure 14
Yahoo! search box.

search box, as seen on many commercial search engines such as Yahoo! (figure 14).

By placing this single search box with different “scopes,” the library can utilize a simple yet powerful component to put discovery and access front and center.

By comparing the design of Yahoo! with Google, one sees two different approaches. Google’s homepage makes it very clear what to do when a user lands (or starts, in many cases) there—the user is going to search. When a user lands at Yahoo!, the options are bountiful, and it is not clear that the first action is searching. A library is much more like Yahoo!: it offers more than just searching of the resources; it is a portal into the world of research.

The Deployment Model

The shift in focus for librarians to better supporting the online user experience has put the deployment of the NGC under high scrutiny. First impressions are everything with the Millennial Generation—if you lose them, regaining their attention can be an incredible feat. Librarians saw that the NGC would be critical to the library’s future and therefore scrutinized the deployment process to leverage its impact. Of the libraries that were analyzed for this report, most followed a common rollout model. The first step, after acquiring the product and working through implementation, was to provide a beta test period. This period had many goals—the libraries wanted user feedback and also wanted to build the library staff’s comfort level with the product before the general release. Libraries seemed hesitant to deploy an NGC without this beta test period. Librarians wanted to gain familiarity with the new solution and have time to use the system themselves to find library materials. This step allowed librarians to build the comfort needed to work with patrons on the new solution. The group of libraries that were evaluated seemed to take this step during a few months prior to the start of a semester. The next step in the process was the launch. Taking a more forceful approach by redesigning the library’s homepage to include the new search box front and center, and minimizing the homepage to add more focus to the new search box, proved to be essential. Many of

the libraries put the new solution front and center on the library’s homepage and hid or removed the “classic” OPAC. By forcing the use of the new solution, they helped the adoption rate and raised the comfort level of the users much more quickly.

Search Engine Optimization

A highly popular concept called SEO, or search engine optimization, has been the focus of content providers and e-commerce retailers online for years. By improving the structure and metadata of the content on their webpages, webmasters can increase the visibility of the website in the search results of open web search engines. With search engines such as Google being the starting point for most Internet users, this is the key to visibility on the Internet. This practice has been growing among libraries that have adopted a NGC solution. By improving the quality of the records in the ILS and other collections, these records can be more visible. Additionally, all NGC solutions utilize a faceted navigation model. This navigation system pulls out elements, or facets, of the metadata in the search results, providing the user with the ability to easily navigate through the results of the search. This faceting exposes the metadata in a whole new way. For example, providing a facet on the subject terms in MARC records has exposed errors in a controlled taxonomy of terms. The term for the United States of America, according to the Library of Congress controlled subject term vocabulary, is *United States*. However, over the years many catalogs have been plagued with cataloging errors that previously had gone undetected. However, via faceting of the metadata elements, many NGCs will expose these errors. For example, a user might find terms such as *U.S.*, *US*, *America*, and so on. A user searching on American history may be provided with the ability to narrow the search results down to these options, negatively impacting the user experience and the success of the NGC. These errors and inconsistencies were nearly impossible to detect prior to the NGC. Cleanup of metadata has grown into a common practice after the deployment of the NGC and continues to be an ongoing activity to improve the quality of the user experience.