

Current State of Discovery in Academic Libraries

Academic libraries allocate substantial portions of their collection budgets to electronic resources and therefore are motivated to ensure that their default search option addresses this content. The methods for providing access to these resources have evolved according to available technology products and services. The early efforts of manually creating lists of electronic resources were soon automated by finding aids such as A–Z lists and other products based on knowledge bases of electronic-resource holdings. These products help libraries manage and direct users to specific journals of interest to their research. Users could search for content on publisher sites and on discipline-specific aggregated databases. Libraries were also interested in providing a simplified mechanism for searching across all the many electronic resources they license on behalf of their user communities. The initial phase of these search products was based on federated search technologies. These products eventually gave way to the index-based discovery products in widespread use today.

Federated search products have largely been abandoned. This technology continues to be used in scenarios where it is important to have current resources and where the number of potential information targets is relatively small.

Index-based discovery services have been adopted by most midsized and large academic libraries. Smaller academic libraries with more modest budgets may subscribe to discovery products directly or gain access to discovery services via consortial license arrangements. The market study provided in chapter 4 sheds light on the nuances of how these products have been implemented across the different levels of academic libraries in the United States.

Table 2.1. Installation statistics reported by vendors for their discovery products as of the end of 2017

| Discovery Product | Installations |
|----------------------------|---------------|
| EBSCO Discovery Service | 16,000 |
| Primo | 2,233 |
| Summon | 740 |
| WorldCat Discovery Service | 3,737 |
| WorldCat Local | 725 |

Product Sales Statistics

Data regarding the sales of discovery services have been covered in the annual “Library Systems Report” published by *American Libraries*.¹ These sales statistics are provided by the vendors and are based on the numbers of contracts and licenses signed by libraries worldwide. The basis of these statistics varies among the vendors, and these variations make it difficult to understand the relative competitive position of each of the products.

Table 2.1 provides the installation statistics reported by each of the vendors for its discovery products as of the end of 2017. According to these statistics, EBSCO Discovery Service (EDS) has been licensed by more libraries than all of the other products combined. This product has been implemented not only by academic libraries, but also by public, school, and corporate libraries and in almost all geographical regions. Many of the libraries covered within consortial, statewide, or national licenses may not necessarily present EDS as their primary search tool. OCLC’s WorldCat Discovery Service or WorldCat Local can be covered by subscriptions to its FirstSearch reference product.

To gain an understanding of the technologies and products that libraries position as their primary search services, it is necessary to look beyond these sales statistics. Alternatively, data can be gathered based on whether the library offers a broad-based search box on its website and what indexes or discovery products are invoked.

Note

1. Marshall Breeding, "Library Systems Report 2018: New Technologies Enable an Expanded Vision of Library Services," *American Libraries*, May 1, 2018, <https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2018/05/01/library-systems-report-2018/>.