

# Current Phase of Discovery

Following a period where discovery services represented more of a strategic area of competition in the library technology arena, libraries currently continue to value these products, but many are less likely to pursue them as an independent purchase. In recent years, there has been a growing trend to acquire a discovery service as part of a broader suite of products. In many cases this product suite will include a library services platform bundled with a discovery service, though some academic libraries have instead selected packages that include an integrated library system (ILS), an electronic resource management utility, and a discovery service.

The high implementation rates of discovery services reflect that most academic libraries with complex collections of print and electronic resources consider it important to offer a broad-based discovery service. Online catalogs focused on locally managed materials that do not encompass the full range of resources acquired by the library are no longer considered as the best search service to feature on the library's website.

Discovery represents one component in the technology infrastructure an academic library requires to support its broad range of operational activities and user services. Though important, the broad search service powered by an index-based discovery service may not be the primary way that most users gain access to library resources. Multiple research studies reveal that only a portion of research begins at the library's website. Even the most compelling search service delivered on the library's website is unlikely to move the needle significantly relative to the portions of researchers who prefer to rely on Google Scholar or discipline-specific search tools. While few large academic libraries opt out of providing a discovery

service on their website, the finite portion of research activity conducted through these products may mitigate the financial and technical resources some libraries devote to them.

Discovery services represent a relatively small portion of the investment in the core library automation environment. Resource management systems, in the form either of a library services platform or an ILS plus an electronic resource management application, can be expected to cost three to five times the cost of a discovery service. From a financial perspective, this differential in cost may mean that for some libraries, the choice of a resource management system may drive the selection of a discovery service. From a user perspective, some libraries may give higher priority to patron-facing products, such as discovery services, over staff-facing resource management platforms.

Academic and research libraries are increasingly looking for technologies to support new areas of activity, such as greater involvement in university research processes and in new ways to promote library resources in courses. Resource management and discovery products continue to represent key technology investments today, but new products supporting these other categories have been introduced, are gaining attention, and seem likely to gain further traction.

In this context of expanding library services and strategies, libraries may consider discovery services more as a commodity and give them a diminished level of attention.

Libraries today have moderate expectations of index-based discovery services. Although these products are a must-have component of their services, most libraries realize that they have limited attraction to researchers well served by Google Scholar and other search environments. Many libraries today

implement measures to improve the accessibility of their licensed resources when accessed through external search services. These efforts include registering their link resolvers with Google Scholar or promoting the use of browser plug-ins that facilitate access to the full text of research articles from citations given in search results or references. These browser plug-ins include Unpaywall from Impactstory; Kopernio, recently acquired by Clarivate Analytics; and Library Access from Lean Library.

*Link resolvers, Google Scholar Library Support*

<https://scholar.google.com/intl/en/scholar/libraries.html>

*Unpaywall*

<https://unpaywall.org/>

*Kopernio*

<https://kopernio.com/>

*Library Access, Lean Library*

<https://www.leanlibrary.com/>

The position of discovery services in the current marketplace can be seen as similar to that of link resolvers a decade ago. Before that time, libraries often acquired link resolvers through a discrete procurement process. These products worked reasonably well with most discovery products and resource management tools. Libraries would evaluate these products based on their functionality and the scope and accuracy of their knowledge bases. Over time, these products became less differentiated and could be acquired as part of a larger purchase, often packaged with a discovery service. As noted in a study conducted by the author for the National Library of Sweden:

Link resolvers and their associated knowledge bases entered the market just over a decade ago as stand-alone products that operated largely independently of existing library management systems, online catalogs, or discovery interfaces. Today, knowledge bases are increasingly positioned as an integral component of a broader set of interrelated products from each vendor, including not only link resolution, but also federated search, electronic resource management, discovery, and as a key asset in next-generation library automation platforms.<sup>1</sup>

Today, discovery services can be seen in a similar position. Although the products do encompass somewhat distinct features and differ to a limited extent in the content addressed, these differences may often be outweighed by an interest in acquiring a product suite

with integrated discovery. In the current phase, pre-integrated options include Alma with Primo, WorldShare Management Services with WorldCat Discovery, BLUEcloud Campus with EBSCO Discovery Service, Encore Duet (with EBSCO Discovery Service), and other ILS-plus-discovery bundles.

## Expectations for Open Discovery

Libraries evaluate discovery services based on their coverage of their body of subscriptions, including those licensed directly from publishers and those represented in Abstracting and Indexing (A&I) services. Since many A&I providers do not provide their content, discovery providers can provide coverage indirectly by indexing the citations and full text of the titles covered. If a library subscribes to a given A&I product, the discovery service vendor might be able to report that it provides indexing for a percentage of the articles covered, even if it does not receive content from that A&I product directly.

Libraries have expectations that each of the discovery services will provide even coverage of the body of academic and scholarly content, spanning all the major publishers. The NISO Open Discovery Initiative issued a Recommended Practice addressing issues and processes related to content providers, discovery service providers, and libraries to achieve transparency in the content coverage of index-based discovery services.<sup>2</sup>

Multiple creators of A&I products have formed exclusive arrangements with EBSCO based on alignment on the value of subject indexing and the design of EBSCO Discovery Service to handle their value-added content. Examples include *RILM (Répertoire International de Littérature Musicale)*, which announced that as of 2015 its content would be available only via EBSCOhost and EBSCO Discovery Service; more recently, Modern Language Association's *MLA International Bibliography* will be offered only through EBSCO effective in 2019. Data from some ProQuest databases likewise are not shared with other discovery services. ProQuest, for example, recently announced that it would be adding additional content from its news products, including ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Recent Newspapers, and Newsstream collections, into Primo. Contrary to ideal expectations, content coverage continues to be a competitive factor among the index-based discovery services.

In the current competitive arena, two of the three organizations offering index-based discovery services—ProQuest and EBSCO Information Services—are also involved in creating content products for libraries, primarily in the form of aggregated citation and full-text databases. In both cases, at least some content resources produced within the company are

not provided to competing discovery services. The ongoing competitive tensions between these two companies has made an impact in unevenness of content availability in their respective discovery services and in the lack of full interoperability between their respective library services platforms and discovery services.

## Notes

1. Marshall Breeding, *Knowledge Base and Link Resolver Study: General Findings* (Stockholm, Sweden: LIBRIS

2. nationella bibliotekssystem, 2012), 6, [http://www.kb.se/dokument/Knowledgebase\\_linkresolver\\_study.pdf](http://www.kb.se/dokument/Knowledgebase_linkresolver_study.pdf).
2. “NISO RP-19-2014 Open Discovery Initiative: Promoting Transparency in Discovery,” Recommended Practice, June 25, 2014, <https://www.niso.org/standards-committees/odi>; Marshall Breeding, *The Future of Library Resource Discovery*, A NISO white paper (Baltimore, MD: NISO, February 2015), <https://www.niso.org/publications/future-library-resource-discovery>.