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OPAC Sustenance: Ex Libris to Serve-Up Primo

Part of **The ILS Scoop** by Marshall Breeding

Fueled by exceptionally successful interfaces found elsewhere on the Web, users of online library services come to the “search table” with extremely high expectations. Google, eBay, Amazon, and Yahoo! are just a few of the major brands that employ Web interfaces palatable to a wide user base. And aside from the good press that North Carolina State University (NCSU) Libraries’ new Endeca-powered OPAC received earlier this year (see “From Swine to Divine: NCSU Unveils New Catalog” and “The Revolution Will be Folksonomied,” on the ALA TechSource Blog; URLs under “Contact”), the traditional library open public access catalog (OPAC) rarely creates a buzz among online searchers. But one of the strongest trends to emerge in early 2006 in the library automation field is the infectious endeavor to—dramatically—improve the library’s Web-based catalog.

Libraries and vendors alike are working on recipes for OPAC-user interfaces that leap beyond the conventional OPAC to cook up an online catalog that features flavorings of the popular Web. Search applications, such as those offered by Endeca and AquaBrowser, for example, gathered momentum in the last year as add-on interfaces for library catalogs. Both were developed originally for non-library content but deliver new search models that go beyond the native capability of library catalogs.

A Tastier OPAC

Ex Libris is among the library-software vendors attempting to revitalize the library environment by creating “next-generation” interfaces. With its new offering, Primo, it has put forward its vision in a product libraries can use to revamp their online offerings.

Now in early development, Primo will be a new end-user information-discovery/delivery tool, delivering access to not only content normally provided by the online catalog, but also other local content, such as digitized collections and that housed in institutional repositories. Additionally, Primo will be designed to offer access to remote collections of interest, e.g., when content is available through protocols such as the Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting. Primo further extends its reach to additional resources through a metasearch component, interfacing with the company’s MetaLib product. According to Ex Libris, Primo aims to provide services for searching as well as delivering access to *all* of the library’s resources, whether those resources are maintained and hosted locally or need to be accessed remotely.

Primo reintegrates the silos of library content by creating indexes of all local

See **OPAC** on page 3

IN THIS ISSUE

The **ILS Scoop** by Marshall Breeding

OPAC Sustenance: Ex Libris to Serve-Up Primo
PAGE 1

Changes at Endeavor
PAGE 2

Polaris Demos AJAX for OPAC
PAGE 4

It’s a Tag, Tag, Tag, Tag World
PAGE 5

Google Corner(ed) by Tom Peters

Google, the Justice Dept., and Our Search Data
PAGE 7

Best MacGyver Ever? Google’s Video Service
PAGE 7

Google Earth Now Available for Macs
PAGE 7

And Finally . . . Google’s Newsletter for Librarians
PAGE 7



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THE ILS SCOOP BY MARSHALL BREEDING

CHANGES AT ENDEAVOR

Endeavor Information Systems made a number of announcements at ALA Midwinter concerning how it names its products. The company has entirely retired The ENCompass brand, formerly associated with several of the company's products.

Here's the new line-up:

- **Curator** replaces ENCompass for Digital Collections, Endeavor's product for creating, searching, and managing local digital content. A revamped version of the product, the first version to take the Curator name, will appear in mid-2006.

- **Journals Onsite** replaces ENCompass for Journals Onsite, a platform for hosting electronic journals locally. The product works with content from all publishers, providing search, storage, and management capabilities.
- Several of Endeavor's products now comprise what is called the **Endeavor Discovery Layer**. The changes here are more than cosmetic; Endeavor has discarded ENCompass for Resource Access, its metasearch-environment offering, which was based on a combination of its own software components and some from MuseGlobal. The company's new metasearch offering, **Discover: Finder**, relies on technology licensed from TDNet. Endeavor expects to add more products to its

Discovery Layer suite in the coming months.

- Endeavor Reporting is now called **Endeavor Analyzer**.

Other product names that will remain unchanged include: Voyager, the company's flagship ILS; the LinkFinderPlus link server, and the Meridian electronic-resource management system.

Personnel changes at Endeavor include the appointment of Geoffrey Adams to a newly formed position as director of archive solutions. Adams, an Elsevier veteran, was previously director of IT Solutions for Endeavor's parent company. The creation of this position reflects the company's interest in developing products and services to assist libraries in archiving local content. Katrina Anderson, who was appointed director of presales and sales operations in August 2005, has left the company.

In a move to prepare for a China market expansion, Endeavor announced a business alliance with Jiangsu Huiwen Software Company, a major library-automation vendor in that country. The company will participate in the development of local interfaces for Endeavor's products and will promote Endeavor products in China. Jiangsu Huiwen offers one of the major library-automation systems, Libsys2000, used in China. The company will continue to market its own ILS in addition to Endeavor's products.

Contact: www.endinfosys.com/cgi-bin/news/viewer.cgi?ID=116
www.endinfosys.com/cgi-bin/news/viewer.cgi?ID=115
www.endinfosys.com/cgi-bin/news/viewer.cgi?ID=114
www.endinfosys.com/cgi-bin/news/viewer.cgi?ID=113

OPAC from page 1

content—both digital and print. Its user interface lies atop a search environment, the Primo Publishing Platform, that receives metadata harvested from its original source, normalizes it for optimized searching, and enhances it with additional metadata and content when available. The platform creates indexes from these combined resources, and through these indexes, Primo can use sophisticated algorithms to deliver ranked results very quickly. In the traditional meta-search model, with search queries cast to multiple targets, the quality search results vary according to the way that each returns records. Speed may be hampered as well, due to either slowly responding targets or network bottlenecks. But Primo delivers one level of ranked results for the content sources within the preharvested and indexed resources; search results can then be extended to the metasearch resources to expand the scope of the search.

The Primo interface looks less like a traditional library catalog, more like what online searchers see in the e-commerce world every day. It sports a simple search box but also includes panes for faceted browsing and for viewing search results. As items appear in the search-results pane, they display with book jackets or other graphics—as you would expect them to in a modern OPAC—and include helpers, often through the use of SFX (Ex Libris's link-resolver offering) to guide the user directly to the item or the appropriate services needed to access or request it.

Incorporating data from sources such as Syndetic Solutions, Blackwell, Amazon, and others, library catalogs increasingly are offering OPAC users book cover images, tables of contents, reviews, and summaries. Most library catalogs that integrate these features blend them with the data from the library's catalog as records display; however, they tend *not* to use this enriched content as part of the search process. With Primo, enrichment data can be incorporated into the indexes to provide additional access points when searching.

Primo's interface also includes capabilities to perform faceted browsing. This method of search navigation breaks away from a strictly hierarchical browsing approach, which does not take into consideration the reality that users like to find items based on combinations of characteristics. Faceted browsing enables users to narrow their searches by combining categories until they retrieve items that match their exact interests.

Today's Web users also expect the items that best match the query to appear at the top of the list. Primo incorporates a ranking scheme that orders search results according to relevancy, and it includes features popular in the e-commerce arena, such as user-supplied reviews, recommendations based on what others that viewed this item also selected, and grouping of like results. Primo, too, will include dictionaries and thesauri to provide search suggestions and structured lists as part of the searching process.

Web Services also on the Menu

One of the key characteristics of current software across industries involves the use of Web services. Based on XML data structures and well-defined protocols, the Web-services architecture allows components of diverse applications to exchange content and services. Primo incorporates Web services in its design so it can be easily extended to incorporate new services and to integrate its capabilities with external applications.

Ex Libris designed Primo to work with *any* of the major library automation systems, not just its own ALEPH 500 ILS. The company has found great success in selling SFX and MetaLib beyond its ALEPH customer base, so it makes sense

But a deeper look at Ex Libris's product offerings reveals a means to create a new model of library automation, based on the primacy of electronic content in libraries today.

that Ex Libris will market Primo to libraries running automation systems provided by its competitors.

On the surface it may seem that Ex Libris offers libraries discrete components that help them manage electronic content. But a deeper look at Ex Libris's product offerings reveals a means to create a new model of library automation, based on the primacy of electronic content in libraries today. With SFX, Metalib (metasearch portal), DigiTool (digital content-creation environment), Verde (electronic-resource management application), and now Primo, Ex Libris is offering its library customers a suite of applications that provide an increasingly comprehensive environment for providing access to and management of

See **OPAC** on next page

THE ILS SCOOP

POLARIS DEMOS AJAX FOR OPAC

Continuing with the OPAC-improvement theme, Polaris Library Systems is one of the first ILS vendors to demonstrate an online catalog based on the trendy AJAX technology.

Recently, AJAX (which stands for “Asynchronous Javascript And XML”) has been adopted by many Web interfaces as a way to provide users with features beyond what’s possible with standard HTML as well as to enable faster response to users’ queries.

One of the key features of AJAX involves the ability to make requests to the server for “data snippets,” a way for users to get updated information without them having to refresh the entire page. A typical AJAX environment consists of the usual HTML and CSS (Cascading Style Sheets) for the basic page layout and presentation, plus the use of a client-side scripting language such as JavaScript. Scripts can issue “XML-HttpRequest” directives to make requests to the server for data snippets as needed by the applications, which the server sends as XML files. The script then parses and displays the data on the existing page, without the need to request the server redisplay the entire page.

As with most technologies, AJAX also has its downside. AJAX requires a Web browser of fairly recent vintage. If users turn off Javascript in their browsers—and many do—the developer must provide a non-AJAX alternative. AJAX also tends to confuse the “back” button, which many users utilize frequently in any Web-browser application.

Contact: www.polarislibrary.com

OPAC *from previous page*

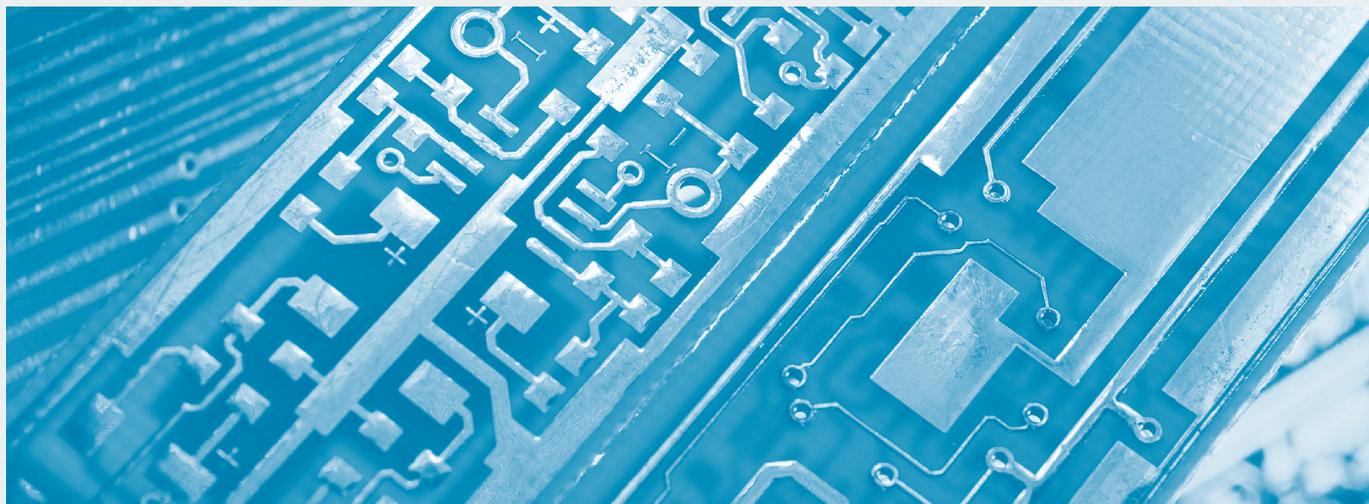
library collections with ever-larger digital proportions. This sphere of applications operates in conjunction with the library’s ILS, which continues to provide important back-room automation tasks, but that is no longer able to serve as the primary delivery vehicle to end-users.

Ex Libris expects to release Primo in 2006. At the ALA Midwinter Meeting in San Antonio in late January, a prototype of the product was available, and the company was selecting libraries as development partners and test sites.

Contact: “From Swine to Divine: NCSU Unveils New Catalog,” www.techsource.ala.org/blog/2006/01/from-swine-to-divine-ncsu-unveils-new-online-catalog.html

“The Revolution Will be Folksonomied,” www.techsource.ala.org/blog/2006/01/the-revolution-will-be-folksonomied.html

Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting, www.openarchives.org/OAI/openarchivesprotocol.html



It's a Tag, Tag, Tag, Tag World

The right to, and manner of, determining, declaring, and sharing information about the “aboutness” of all types of digital objects appear to be undergoing a fundamental transformation. It’s difficult to tell if a renaissance of controlled-subject vocabularies, tagging, and subject cataloging is in the offing, or if the recent developments signal the death knell of the methods of determining the aboutness of an information object that we all learned in library school. Tagging, in particular, and the social Web, in general, *could* have a major impact on how digital libraries evolve.

Two pieces of evidence of this revolution in progress are offered for your consideration.

The BSTF Report

The first is the December 2005 Final Report of the Bibliographic Services Task Force (BSTF) of the University of California Libraries. In the Recommendation III.2c part of “Rethinking How We Provide Bibliographic Services for the University of California” it states: “Consider using controlled vocabularies only for name, uniform title, date, and place, and abandoning the use of controlled vocabularies [LCSH, MESH, etc.] for the topical subjects in bibliographic records. Consider whether automated enriched data, such as TOC, indexes, become surrogates for the subject headings and classification for retrieval.”



The report goes on to say that, in the digital world where direct access to the full content usually is just a click away, metadata standards that emphasize retrieval are more useful than descriptive cataloging practices.

The task force, comprised of five librarians, was split on this issue. In the report, the minority opinion expressed that there’s some value in topical subject headings assigned by trained professionals using controlled-subject vocabularies, especially for large collections containing multiple languages.

Notice that the report writers *do not go so far* as to suggest that actual document users should have an opportunity to suggest a word or phrase that captures the aboutness of the document, nor do they suggest that users should be offered the opportunity to vote on previously proffered words and phrases.

(A PDF of the BSTF’s Final Report is available via Karen G. Schneider’s Janu-

ary 16, 2006, ALA TechSource Blog post, “The Revolution Will be Folksonomied,” at www.techsource.ala.org/blog/2006/01/the-revolution-will-be-folksonomied.html.)

An Online Ecosystem

The second piece of evidence is the recent launch of TagWorld. TagWorld tries to improve upon groundbreaking applications, such as Flickr and del.icio.us, to release the masses’ pent-up impulses to tag and share digital content. TagWorld, a privately held company founded in July 2005, describes itself as an “online ecosystem” and sees the five essential ingredients for the social Web as: people, photos, blogs, tags, and storage. As of late in the day on January 25, there were 565,000 inhabitants of this ecosystem. According to an

See **Tag** on next page

Tag from previous page

article about TagWorld in the February 7 issue of *PC Magazine*, each registrant gets 1 GB of free space, with an option to lease additional space. In mid-January TagWorld added a video feature, presumably as the sixth essential feature.

Advertisements are the main revenue generator for TagWorld. To get a sense of this new tag mentality, consider this quote from the FAQ on the TagWorld site: “Tags are an awesome way to search for things you are interested in. So if you do a photo search for concerts, you will see results from people who tagged their photo as concert. As more people tag, the more useful and interesting the

use, the subject(s) of each digital document? Authors, distributors, aggregators, indexers, librarians, experts in the discipline, and even end-users all could take a stab at this. Why not everyone?

Then let each user decide if and how they want to filter the use and display of tags along various parameters—the education, socio-economic status, nationality, age, sex of the tagging population, for example.

A Problem for Everyone Else?

One potential problem with this incipient tag-fest is that most taggers may have little interest in trying to capture

the topic of interest contributes *only in a very minor way* to the summative aboutness of the digital object considered as a whole.

This potential problem also could be understood as one of the strengths of the emerging tag, tag, tag, tag world, because, when someone is searching for information contained in digital documents, he or she is not only trying to understand the aboutness of the documents brought to his or her attention, but is also trying to find as many unique instances of discussions of the topic of interest across the entire document landscape.

Another potential problem with widespread folk-tagging is that tags can become cliquish (not the same as clickish) and exclusionary. To take an example from librarianship, the tag “L2” will mean “Library 2.0” to the library-tech cognoscenti. For all others, it could mean just about anything imaginable, from a spreadsheet cell to a terrorist cell.

Looks like we’re going to need a wiki just to contain all of the definitions and scope notes for all the tagging schemes that are sprouting up like mushrooms in a hothouse.—Tom Peters

One potential problem with this incipient tag-fest is that most taggers may have little interest in trying to capture and summarize the overall or essential aboutness of the digital object they are tagging.

world becomes. So stop asking questions and start tagging.”

In the dawning era of diverse online communities, myriad digital documents, and variegated tagging systems, who has the authority—or who should have, but that just begs the question: Who has the authority to *grant* the authority?—to articulate, and profess for all to read and

and summarize the overall or essential aboutness of the digital object they are tagging. For example, if a tagger spots something of interest in a digital object, the tagger will want to tag that object with a word or phrase so that others interested in that same topic will know that something about it is contained therein. The tagger will do this even if

Contact: www.techsource.ala.org/blog/2006/01/the-revolution-will-be-folksonomied.html
<http://libraries.universityofcalifornia.edu/sopag/BSTF/Final.pdf>
www.tagworld.com
www.pcmag.com/article2/0,1759,1914329,00.asp



Google Corner(ed) BY TOM PETERS

Google, the Justice Dept., and Our Search Data

In January, the U.S. Justice Department tried to use the courts to “compel” Google to comply with a subpoena issued in August 2005 to supply the Justice Department with a large batch—a week’s worth—of search terms (input by Google’s search-engine users) as well as the list of resulting URLs. The federal government claims to need this information to build its case that the 1998 Child Online Protection Act, still being reviewed by the courts, would work better than filtering software to prevent underage Web surfers from finding inappropriate material and commercial sites. When the story broke in the *San Jose Mercury News* on January 19, it released a torrent of media coverage, editorials, and blog postings.

One interesting fact in this case is that while Google has refused to comply with the Feds’ subpoena, the *New York Times* reported that three other major search services—AOL, Yahoo!, and MSN—have turned over the requested data, apparently readily.

Gee, maybe Google really is like the celestial library—not only in terms of its goal (to organize the world’s information) but also in terms of its values and principles. Before we jump to that conclusion, though, we should remind ourselves that Google is trying to protect its trade secrets, rebuild a squeaky-clean public image, and differentiate itself from all the other search engines. But by refusing to comply with the subpoena and the subsequent motion to compel, they may have taken a major step in that direction.

SearchEngineWatch has compiled a useful summary of the subpoena, letters, and motion to compel.

“Feds after Google Data,” *San Jose Mercury News*, January 19, 2006, by Howard Mintz, www.siliconvalley.com/mld/siliconvalley/13657386.htm
www.nytimes.com/2006/01/20/technology/20google.html?th&emc=th (available through *NY Times Select*)
<http://blog.searchenginewatch.com/blog/060119-161802>

Best MacGyver Ever? Google’s Video Service

After observing the phenomenal early success of the video store at iTunes, Google decided to launch its own online video store. At its launch, it contained a true hodgepodge of video content, including amateur videos (called “personal productions” on the site), movies, music videos, documentaries, a few current CBS primetime shows (e.g., *CSI*, *Survivor Guatemala*), and classic shows (e.g., *The Brady Bunch*, *MacGyver*). Some of the content is free; for some you pay a fee. Most of the content can be downloaded and viewed using Google’s video player.

Although Google almost always slaps a “beta” label on every new resource and tool it unleashes, Google Video definitely is a resource in progress. It seems a little rushed and not yet ready for primetime.

<http://video.google.com>

Google Earth Now Available for Macs

In January, the cool tool Google Earth for the PC shucked its beta status, and

a new version, Google Earth for the Macintosh, was released. The Mac version runs on OS X, version 10.4 and higher. The PC version will run on either Microsoft Windows 2000 or XP (recommended).

A free version of Google Earth is available for home and personal use. Google Earth Plus, the paid version for home/personal use with added features, costs twenty dollars per year, and Google Earth Pro for businesses costs four hundred dollars per year.

<http://earth.google.com>

And Finally . . . Google’s Newsletter for Librarians

Recently, Google started an e-mail newsletter designed specifically for librarians. The “Google Librarian Center” homepage states: “Librarians and Google share have a similar a mission [sic]: to organize the world’s information and make it universally accessible and useful.”

The first issue (December 19, 2005) contained one article by Matt Cutts, a quality engineer at Google, about how Google ranks results. The second issue (January 19, 2006) contained a follow-up article by Cutts as well as an article by Karen G. Schneider director of the Librarians’ Internet Index (LII.org), LITA Councilor for ALA, and contributor to the ALA TechSource Blog.

As a newsletter *can* signify an attempt to court or woo someone, this one, aimed at librarians, apparently grew out of the feedback Google received from its booth on the exhibit floor at the ALA Annual Conference in Chicago in June 2005.

www.google.com/services/librarian_center.html
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