Discovering Library Resources using WebFeat Express: Selection, Implementation, and Lessons Learned

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Background

- A task force was formed in 2006 to investigate implementing a federated searching system at Himmelfarb Library.
- The team’s task was to identify the most appropriate search tool, balancing cost and usability.
- Externally, the software for federated searching was increasing in availability and many libraries were choosing it as a discovery aid for library users.

Selection of Federated Search Technology

- After initial examination of possible systems, the committee focused on four systems: Metalib, Serials Solutions 360 Search, Swetswise Searcher and WebFeat Express.
- Desirable / required features included: an administrative website to customize the search interface, the ability to search an unlimited number of databases simultaneously, compatibility with the SFX link resolver, inclusion of catalog search results, a built-in thesaurus, and a large knowledgebase of translators.
- A worksheet of questions was answered for each system and demonstrations of each of the four systems were arranged so the committee could preview the software.
- Products were eliminated from consideration due to poor evaluations from libraries who had used the software, lack of an administrative control panel, and a low number of existing translators for resources in the Himmelfarb collection.
- In the end, the top two contenders were WebFeat Express and Serials Solutions. The committee weighed the advantages of selecting Serials Solutions (known vendor, good experience with other products) and WebFeat (administrative control panel, broader list of federated databases) and selected WebFeat.

Steps for Implementation

- The WebFeat implementation phase included customizing the search and results web pages to match the look and feel of the overall Himmelfarb website.
- WebFeat search boxes were incorporated into the development version of the Himmelfarb Library’s homepage, E-databases, and E-texts pages.
- Forty databases/ full-text resources were selected for inclusion.
- A live demonstration of the customized software was given to library staff who were then asked to test the software and provide feedback regarding their search experience.
- Usability testing with GWUMC faculty and students was performed.
- Translators were integrated into the search profile when available and created when none existed. The process of obtaining translators for all databases took approximately two to three months.
- Numerous bugs were submitted to WebFeat support staff over the two to three month test period and all issues were subsequently resolved.

Marketing WebFeat to Users

- Posters were hung throughout the Himmelfarb Library and Ross Hall, as well as in the George Washington University Hospital.
- Live demonstrations of the tool were given in January to all MSI PCL classes and half page flyers were placed in MS II mailboxes.
- Emails promoting the multidatabase tool were sent out through student, faculty, and resident listservs as well as via the library liaison emails.
- Classes/ demos of searching WebFeat were conducted with faculty and students.
- Himmelfarb Library news blog and newsletter entries were also used to promote the tool.

Evaluation and Lessons Learned

- Following rollout, both verbal and emailed feedback was low. Anecdotal feedback that was received suggested that the discovery of e-texts was among WebFeat’s greatest strengths.
- The strength of the tool in facilitating the discovery of e-texts was further supported by student feedback in PCL sessions and in statistical reports.
- The top five databases with the highest total search numbers from January - May 2009 were Ebrary, MDConsult, Scopus, Books@Ovid, and AccessMedicine.
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- Other statistical reports over the same time period show an average of 92.5 searches per day, with a minimum of 18 searches occurring on 1/20/09, (Inauguration Day), and a maximum of 249 searches occurring on 04/13/09.

Going Forward

- We will continue to monitor vendor news updates regarding the next version of the Serial Solutions 360 Search product which is reported to combine the best features from WebFeat and the Serials Solutions 360 Search product.
- In addition, we will be monitoring the new Summon product from Serials Solutions and comparing it to the federated search software.
- We will continue to incorporate WebFeat into other library resources such as LibGuides where appropriate and provide instruction about the tool as new students and faculty arrive at GWUMC.