

web-scale discovery (wsd) <http://bit.ly/1webP6Z>

what is it?

The terms “discovery layer” and “web-scale discovery” are often used interchangeably, but they are distinct entities.

Athena Hoepfner (2012) defined web-scale discovery as “a preharvested central index coupled with a richly featured discovery layer providing a single search across a library’s local, open access, and subscription collections.”

The discovery layer itself is the mechanism used to search for indexed information. Its purpose is to simplify the search process, and to make information and library collections easier to find, or more “discoverable.”

Essentially, the discovery layer is the user interface used to search the wealth of information in the central index.



how does it work?

Unlike federated searching tools, which run a number of searches across platforms, web-scale discovery (WSD) tools run a single search across platforms and present the results to end users. The user searches for information using the discovery layer (the interface), and the WSD tool runs the search and the user sees the search results in a single list.

who’s doing it?

Everybody! Initially perceived as a tool most useful in academic libraries, many different types of information organizations have implemented web-scale discovery services. Academic, school, public, special and corporate libraries, and even government libraries, have begun to offer web-scale discovery services for users.

Vendors have responded with a variety of products to serve a diverse market for web-scale discovery services. The most common commercial web-scale discovery products are Serial Solutions Summon™, Ebsco Discovery Services, Primo, and WorldCat.

why is it significant?

In an age where academic research habits have transitioned from complex Boolean search strings to natural language, “Google-like” searching, users have come to expect accurate, relevant results in a timely way.

With information now easier to find, web-scale discovery services have changed the questions users and library staff ask – the focus shifts from “how do I *find* information?” to “how do I *evaluate* the wealth of information I’ve found?”

As a result, librarians must reconsider how they deliver many of their services, and adapt to support such a significant change in information seeking practices.

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further reading

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- Moore, K.B. & Greene, C. (2012). Choosing discovery: A literature review on the selection and evaluation of discovery layers. *Journal of web librarianship* 6(3), 145-163.
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what are the challenges?

Implications can be far-reaching in academic libraries. Web-scale discovery impacts many aspects of academic library operations and services, including reference, instruction, technical services, and systems.

The ease of finding information may mean that users assume that they have all the knowledge required to do their research. This presents a challenge in providing high-level instruction in the use of web-scale discovery tools. It also poses a challenge to providing reference services. Many librarians think that commercial WSD tools are not as customizable as they could be and are difficult to integrate these products with both a library's web presence and its specific branding. Thus, many are exploring alternatives to commercial WSD tools.

where is it going?

As web-scale discovery services become the preferred method of searching for academic materials, many librarians are exploring the option of implementing open source products, such as VuFind or Blacklight, as opposed to popular commercial products, given that the latter have been criticized for their lack of customization options. Furthermore, staff at some academic libraries are using open source discovery products in conjunction with open source integrated library systems (ILS) to achieve the highest level of customization possible.

what are the implications for libraries?

Despite the increasing prevalence of web-scale discovery services, the WSD tools offered in academic libraries continue to compete with Google and other web-based searching products to become our users' preferred method of finding academic information. This is not likely to change in the future: we must learn to adapt. Web-scale discovery services are challenging libraries to provide relevant search tools and library services to support research.

All OCULA Information Briefs are available at: <http://bit.ly/1IKV9Jt>.