



Problems With Usability in OPACs

– Do the Discovery and Delivery Solutions Solve Them?

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Traditional OPACs

Libraries' traditional OPACs are definitely not perfect. My research of their usability and research on end users behavior proved many problems in their information architecture and problems with using it by patrons. OPACs are not attractive, but most important problem is that in many cases they are also hard to use, especially for people who try to use it for the first time.

Discovery and delivery solutions

Libraries goal should be to make library system front end intuitive, easy to use and even more – attractive to patrons, and make them to come back to library discovery and delivery solution with pleasure instead of using different sources not connected with libraries.

Way to reach that goal can be implementing next generation OPAC – discovery and delivery solution. But is it enough? Does it solve problems?

Library

Search

Problem in OPAC

Users do not use advanced search despite it is a default

Solution in discovery systems

One search box as a default



Problem in OPAC

Sorting alphabetically

Solution in discovery systems

Sorting by relevance as a default



Problem in OPAC

User have to choose index to search in

Solution in discovery systems

Searching in all indexes as a default



Problem in OPAC

Professional vocabulary in labeling systems (eg 'OPAC')

Solution in discovery systems

It is better, but there are still many problems with Polish labeling systems



Problem in OPAC

No results or irrelevant search results in case of misspelling

Solution in discovery systems

'Did you mean...' function



Problem in OPAC

Interface totally different than library's website

Solution in discovery systems

Search box on main page of library's website



Problem in OPAC

No facets refining function

Solution in discovery systems

Using facets to refine search results



Problem in OPAC

Uncomfortable or impossible using it on mobile devices

Solution in discovery systems

Designed for mobile devices



Problem in OPAC

User have to search each database separately

Solution in discovery systems

All databases searched at once



Conclusion

In fact many usability problems can be and are solved with discovery and delivery systems. But the truth is that many of them could and should be solved even in traditional OPAC. It is not the technological barrier which makes advanced search as a default and causes using professional vocabulary in user interface.

Especially problems with labeling systems show that it is not enough to update software to modern one. The most important thing is to understand users' needs and try to fulfill them, whatever what kind of software you use.

However using discovery and delivery system gives many possibilities as searching many databases at once or search results' facets refining. This kind of software makes searching **easier, more intuitive, effective and attractive**.