



# Discovery is the researcher's dream

Discovery is the researcher's dream. The dream of a straightforward search that allows information seekers to find the content they are looking for and, more importantly, relevant content they do not yet know about. Librarians, system vendors and content providers aim to materialize this dream of efficient and accurate discovery motivated by rationales that vary from the noble goals of knowledge creation and sharing to profit-driven commercial grounds.

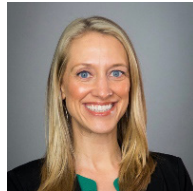
## Keywords

discovery; metadata; search engines; online public access catalogues (OPACs); open web discovery; resource discovery systems



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The past 15 years has irrevocably altered the state of information discovery with traditional library catalogues competing with, adjusting to and leveraging search engine technology. Since Google's initial public offering in 2004, search engines have dethroned catalogues and OPACs (online public access catalogues) as the one-stop solution and panacea for all search-related ills. Yet as searchers have largely migrated to Google in droves, particularly for non-academic information needs, the rich bibliographic data inside library catalogues have become increasingly valuable when opened to the web.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, libraries have begun to leverage tools such as Google Analytics for their own discovery services and Google Maps for GIS (geographic information system) services, highlighting the increasingly symbiotic relationship between library and open web discovery.<sup>2</sup>

'The past 15 years have irrevocably altered the state of information discovery'

To meet the needs of information users growing increasingly accustomed to single search box technology, libraries began working with vendors in earnest around 2010 to implement resource discovery systems provided by EBSCO, Ex Libris, ProQuest, OCLC and others. With the arrival of vendor-based discovery services in libraries, a wide array of implementation case studies were published.<sup>3</sup> In testing these new discovery systems, some libraries used it as an opportunity to test accessibility and discovery implementation.<sup>4</sup>

2 Libraries adopted resource discovery services to meet user needs, improve library interfaces and enhance user experience. Implementation of discovery services has cost libraries many hours working on the interface design in order to balance the need for end-user usability and the information displayed on the resources for different formats and access points;<sup>5</sup> making surveys and analysis to measure the impact of the implementation.<sup>6</sup>

Despite all these efforts, soon after implementation, discovery tools started showing their gaps. The initial negative feelings among end-users highlighted that some were missing the simplicity of library catalogue searches and were feeling overwhelmed by the long list of results and access options.<sup>7</sup> Another notable problem was the lack of meaningful analytics to assess performance and justify the return on investment for publishers.<sup>8</sup> A secondary concern was the lack of transparency on the search algorithms used to connect users with content via the discovery systems, particularly salient considering the significant investment in library collections.<sup>9</sup> The strong dependency of library systems in general and discovery tools in particular on the quality of metadata was exposed by Shadle in 2013 and Bascones and Staniforth in 2018.<sup>10</sup>

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After all the efforts and excitement of implementation, it is clear that to materialize the dream of discovery we require the cross-sectoral collaboration of libraries, content providers and system vendors.<sup>11</sup>

These three main discovery actors have interdependent vital chemistry, but at the same time they are pulled apart by their own interests and priorities. Librarians carry on their shoulders the burden of making discovery tools work, but their solo efforts are not enough. Institutional initiatives show the powerful skills that libraries have and are examples of going beyond the commercial tools in the market.<sup>12</sup> It is clear that the road of discovery required something other than individual efforts. Looking beyond the discovery ecosystem itself, libraries, content providers and system vendors could also benefit from working with each other to understand better user behaviours and digital experiences.

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Ten years of *Insights* articles on discovery show us examples of indomitable spirits, stories of creativity, passion and perseverance, but the lofty promises of easy and effective discovery tools have not yet come to fruition. The tools are among us, but students, academics, librarians, publishers and service providers still lack certainty that the one-stop search box is giving them the full results, in the right order and using the proper criteria.

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Now discovery is moving towards new horizons, opening up new ambitions based on the efforts of technology actors who are introducing free indexing services like Dimensions<sup>13</sup> or using AI for more accurate search matches.<sup>14</sup> But most importantly, the discussion about discovery is now also covering research data and data management.<sup>15</sup>

These new horizons bring new questions as, for example, the relevancy of discovery services (limited to the extent of an institutional library collection) vs. new indexing services (on principle including a greater diversity of metadata but probably excluding specialized and niche collections). The new developments also bring back 'old' questions like the one from Kortekaas and Kramer, who had the courage to move away from library systems and concentrate their efforts on delivery.<sup>16</sup> On doing this, they decided not to pursue the dream of discovery, leaving their end-users to do what they are good at, finding what they need.<sup>17</sup>

#### Abbreviations and Acronyms

A list of the abbreviations and acronyms used in this and other *Insights* articles can be accessed here – click on the URL below and then select the 'full list of industry A&As' link: <http://www.uksg.org/publications#aa>.

#### Competing Interests

The authors have declared no competing interests.

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