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Marketing the Virtual Library.

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COMPLETE COVERAGE OF LIBRARY INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

COMPUTERS & LIBRARIES

THE VIRTUAL
LIBRARY

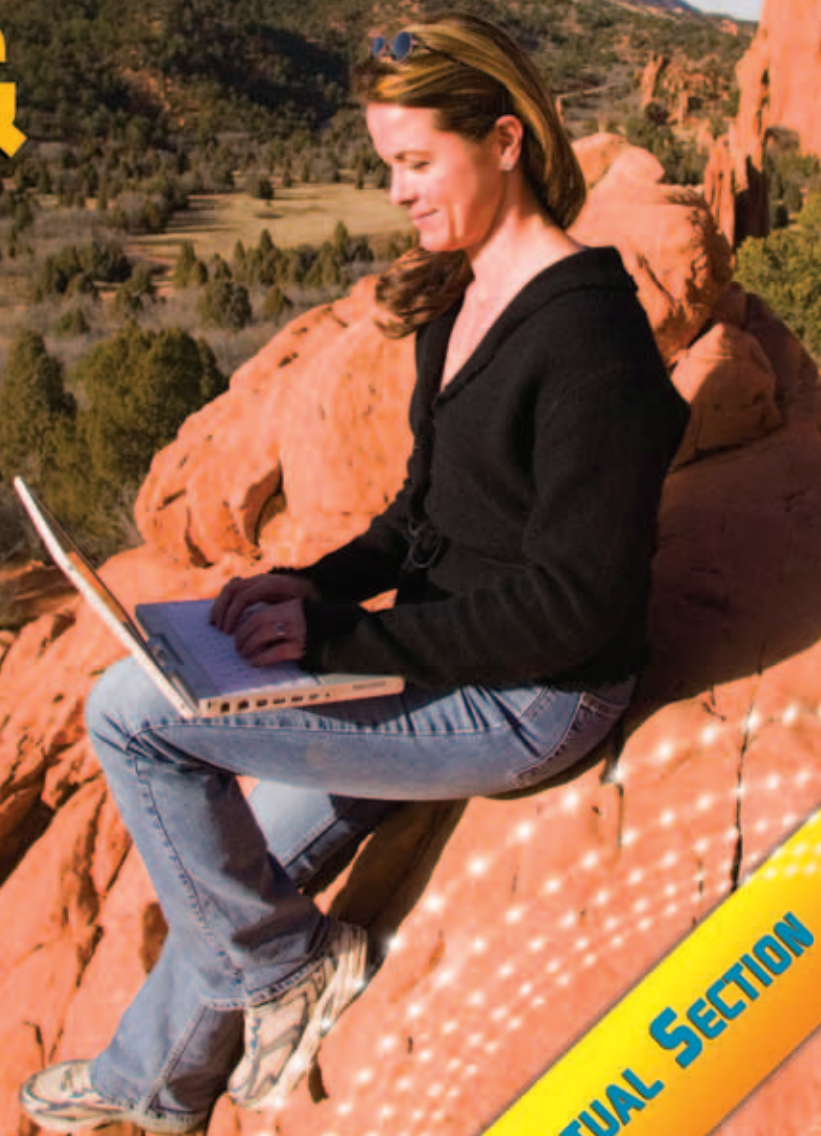
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JANUARY 2009

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Providing Access
**When &
Where**
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COVER DESIGN BY DANIELLE M. NICOTRA

Marketing the VIRTUAL LIBRARY

BY
Jody Condit
Fagan

By carefully planning and evaluating your library's marketing efforts regarding its virtual presence, you can determine which strategies will get the most bang for your buck.

Far more people are familiar with their local public or college library facility than their library's website and online resources. In fact, according to a recent survey, 96% of Americans said they had visited a library in person, but less than one-third have visited their online library. Yet people agree online library resources are valuable! Why this disconnect? Although there may be many reasons, one way libraries can bridge the gap is through better marketing of electronic resources and of the library website itself.

Maximizing the Potential of Electronic Resources

At James Madison University, where I serve as content interfaces coordinator, we have found that an important first step toward marketing your virtual library is making sure your electronic resources are easily



searchable and are customized in the most effective way possible. For any online collection larger than a few titles, some technical features you should look for from the vendor include the following:

- ▶ The ability to metasearch the collection or database
- ▶ Unique, durable URLs for entry pages and for specific subject areas and sources
- ▶ HTML code for placing a search box to the resource anywhere on a website
- ▶ Integration with link resolver software
- ▶ Easy links for users to share results with others (email, save, export, and print)
- ▶ COUNTER-compliant statistics

Vendors may also offer the following materials to assist with marketing:

- ▶ MARC records, preferably free, complete with subject headings, and easy to download
- ▶ Free downloadable PDF files of posters, user guides, and other information pieces
- ▶ Templates for email announcements/press releases
- ▶ Online tutorials and user-friendly help pages

For aggregated resources that contain many different types of resources, make sure you provide links on your website to the specific parts of the resource that might interest your patrons. For example, several major article databases offer supplementary image collections. If you have a webpage listing resources with images, you should make links directly to the image collections within your aggregators. Users who need illustrations for presentations will thank you!

While most databases and journal collections can be searched by federated search software and linked together with link resolvers, ebook and e-reference book collections can present a special challenge. A recent survey by the ebook vendor eBrary found the major obstacle to use of electronic books is lack of awareness. Some possible reasons for that lack include the following:

- ▶ Library users may not be aware of why they should consult a reference source.

Ebooks and e-reference books are often listed individually in libraries' catalogs, and many catalogs do not have an easy way to search for this format specifically.

- ▶ Ebooks and e-reference books are often listed individually in libraries' catalogs, and many catalogs do not have an easy way to search for this format specifically.
- ▶ Ebooks and e-reference books are not visible on a shelf near their physical counterparts.
- ▶ Users are unaware of the extra features ebooks offer, such as text highlighting, quick lookup of words and phrases, and bookmarking.

Several tools exist for users to search across e-reference books. Reference Universe, sold by Paratext, allows users to search complete back-of-the-book indexes and article titles from more than 12,000 print and electronic reference books (www.paratext.com/ru_intro.htm). Limits are available to restrict the search to the library's local holdings or to just e-reference titles.

Web Marketing Techniques to Promote Online Resources

Leverage the online catalog: Library catalog software was not built to showcase electronic resources. Even just providing a list of available electronic reference books can be a challenge! Libraries with large online collections may be wondering if they need to create a third area on their websites to parallel online database and online journal listings. Many catalogs allow searches to be prelaunched with parameters set. Consider creating one or more "canned searches" for different types of electronic resources and offering direct entry points.

Some newer catalog interfaces allow relevancy ranking to float electronic journals or databases to the top of results pages. This allows a search on **science** to immediately find the ejournal *Science* before returning the many thousands of book matches in an OPAC. Next-generation catalog interfaces with faceted browsing can also show off e-resources by showing the number of results for categories such as ejournals, ebooks, and e-databases.

Optimize your website for search engines: Sometimes a webpage you know exists may not appear at the top of a search engine's results set even for the most obvious search terms. One solution to this problem is metadata.

Review the library website's metadata, such as page title, keywords, and description, and improve the keywords. Optimization tools such as Wordtracker (www.wordtracker.com) can help you identify good candidates.

For a Google search on an actual library's name (we'll use the Smith Library for this article), the library's homepage was the fourth result. Notice how the description is composed of words from the body of the page, rather than metadata.

SMITH LIBRARY

... Giving to Generic, Information Technology, Job Openings, Library, Registrar ... SMITH LIBRARY. Search our Catalog: ... Image of students in library ...
www.generic.edu/library/ - 16k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)

By adding the metatags shown in Figure 1, this result listing could rise to the top and appear as follows:

Smith Library—The best research resources for Generic University
Smith Library provides ejournals, research databases, and expert help from librarians to Generic University students ...
www.generic.edu/library/ - 16k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)

Which search result listing is more attractive?

Metatags for Search Engines

```
<title>Smith Library – The best research
resources for Generic University</title>

<meta name="description" content="Smith Library
provides ejournals, research databases, and
expert help from librarians to Generic
University students">

<meta name="keywords" content="smith library,
smith, generic university, gu library,
research, help">
```

Figure 1

Create landing pages for your promotional materials: As you optimize your website, think about possible landing pages for your users beyond the homepage. Commercial emails with messages such as "Get 25% off until Sunday from Sierra Trading Post" will have an email-specific URL that not only ensures your discount but also shows you the page the company thinks you'll want to see the most. Imagine marketing library resources that provide information about political campaigns and elections. You could create a landing page (www.library.edu/politics, for instance) that highlights the top resources. Not only will your patrons be happier, you will easily be able to track the success of your effort.

Advertise on the web: In addition to making your site visible and attractive in search engines, you can conduct web advertising on other sites or on your own site. At Western Michigan University, Michael Whang used banner ads on the library website and tracked conversion rates for patrons recommending new DVDs and for renewing books online, and he plans to add banners for "Ask A Librarian" services and specific subscription databases.

Community and campus partners may want to post your web banner ads or link to your site, especially if you have designed targeted landing pages. Your local small business support office would likely link from its site to yours if you have a page of resources for its patrons. In a college setting, writing or tutoring centers' websites may welcome links to pages that would support students, especially "after hours."

Advertise on social networking sites: Facebook and similar social networking sites can be a relatively cheap, even free, option for libraries with younger users. Libraries can create their own Facebook pages for free. As users interact with a page, their actions show up in their friends' feeds, creating viral marketing. If your library has a Facebook page already, does it do a good job reflecting the online library? Many libraries' Facebook pages focus on their buildings, so perhaps the online library needs its own Facebook page!

You can also buy highly targeted advertising on Facebook. For example, I was able to set up an ad for students "in college" at "James Madison University." This ad reached about 6,000 people. Facebook allows you to pay per click or per view. It may not pay to run a Facebook ad for the entire year, but what about the second week of school or during the few weeks before finals?

Making Virtual Connections From the Library's Physical Space

It may seem counterintuitive to market virtual collections in physical space, but if there's one thing the people in the library building have in common, it's that they already



have a reason to be there. For those who are in the library to seek information, the library's online resources will be of high interest—a marketer's dream!

Think for a moment about your physical library. Most libraries have book stacks, a reference collection, a periodicals area, and spaces for groups to form. Now think about your virtual library: Do you have electronic books? Online periodicals? Do you offer online tools for your users to create groups online? For each online area with a physical equivalent, consider using promotional tools in the physical area!

Books and reference collections:

Most users do not stroll through the reference shelves on a regular basis. But scholars, those who have participated in library instruction, and students with specific class assignments will continue to visit the shelves for some time. Library "power users" such as these who discover their favorite encyclopedia online may use it repeatedly and tell their colleagues or friends (see Figure 2).

E-reference book companies likely have free posters they would be more than willing to send. Be sure to match up the subject area of the e-reference book or collection with the correct call number range. Short on space? Consider a "Featured E-Reference Book" display that changes each month. Even though you might be advertising fewer titles, the display will always inform users that there is an e-reference collection and how to get to it. Finally, for major reference titles the library has acquired online but still has in print, be sure to put a sign or "book dummy" on the shelf next to the print equivalent (see Figure 3).

For electronic books, book dummies will probably not be an option. But posters on the ends of the shelves advertising collections can still catch patrons' eyes. For example, in the history section, you could put up a poster listing not only ebook history collections but also the top online databases, journals, and primary sources.

Study areas: Posters, table tents, and fliers can be used in reading areas or study areas to promote online social spaces or other resources. They can also market online reference services and resources.

Journals/current periodicals: Book dummies or signs near a journal with an online equivalent can make it obvious the library not only has *Scientific American* in the library building but also as an online subscription! Signs near newspapers can alert users that the library not only has cur-

rent online versions but even newspaper archives, which may not be available in public search engines.

Exhibits: On location and on the road! Another idea is creating physical exhibits about your electronic resources. One public library in Illinois used the following process to create trade-show-style exhibits:

1. Select the resources you want to highlight.
2. Identify your potential user groups.
3. Choose locations where your potential users are likely to be.
4. Use promotional materials, such as giveaways.
5. Tailor your presentation to the audience.

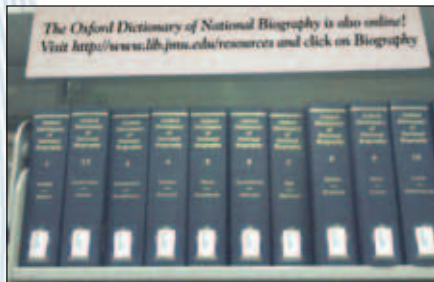


Figure 2. Signage in the physical reference collection



Figure 3. Book dummy in the physical reference collection

Offering training—virtual and physical:

Another way libraries can increase the use of electronic collections is by offering training, both online and face-to-face. At my library, we see a direct correlation between library instruction sessions and database usage. Yet some resources may not lend themselves well to current library instruction. In academic libraries, for example, the emphasis on teaching database search strategy for

finding peer-reviewed journals may not leave time for the librarian to show off the online reference sources. Try to think of an interesting angle for your workshop topic; for example, "Wikipedia versus Encyclopedia Britannica: What's the difference?" This strategy plays to one of libraries' strengths: face-to-face interaction.

Traditional Marketing Tailored to Online Resources

The expense and scale of traditional print and media marketing may not be an option for all libraries, but targeted techniques may prove feasible. College libraries, for example, have a well-defined audience with existing channels.

Postcards, brochures, and fliers: At my library, the electronic resources librarian worked with subject liaisons to coordinate a postcard marketing campaign for electronic resources. Using the campus bulk mailing procedures and copy center, postcards were made for several academic departments on campus with a few electronic

resources deemed highly relevant to the subject area (see Figure 4).

Also, non-subject-specific brochures about general resources were sent to the writing center.

Newspaper advertisements: Advertising in a college newspaper can be an affordable option for the occasional marketing blitz. Here are a few tips for running newspaper ads in college papers:

- ▶▶▶▶ Run ads a few weeks before midterms and finals.
- ▶▶▶▶ Request your ad to appear in the top right or center of a page.
- ▶▶▶▶ Consider partnering with another office on campus to make the ad more affordable! The writing center, residence life, or an academic department might be willing to partner up. For example, imagine an ad with the local coffee shop:

Pulling an all-nighter to write a paper?

Grab a cup of Joe at CampusCoffee.

Go online for just-in-time research help:

<http://mylibrary.edu/latenight>.

Newspaper articles: You can get space in any newspaper for free if you have a marketable article. College newspapers are an easy sell because library research is something most students need to do. If you are being interviewed, be sure to give the reporter a handout of any facts and numbers you cover.

Bulk mail/email: At colleges and universities, you may be able to use campus systems to distribute a user-centered announcement about online resources through email or with mailing labels. Some systems can create targeted lists for you with custom parameters, such as “graduate students in psychology” or “political science instructors.” At my institution, new faculty could receive a letter at the beginning of each year introducing the library’s online resources. If you’re using email, be sure you have a catchy subject line. In the body of the email, be sure you can show in 15 seconds how the resource will improve the user’s life. Target the emails toward as specific a group as possible, and use a landing page for those users.

Radio: If you have a college radio station, it may be required to read public service announcements for free or offer inexpensive advertising.

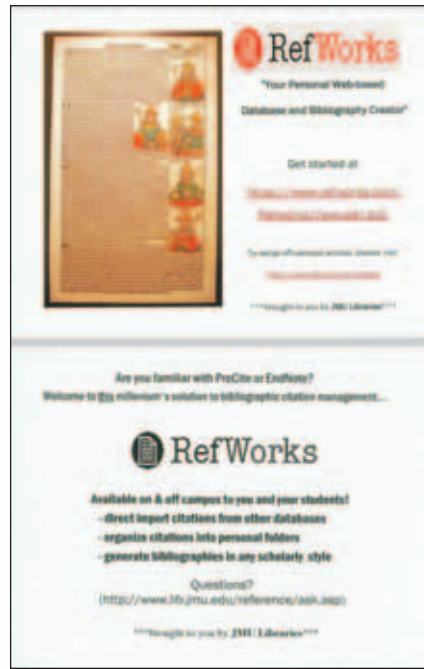


Figure 4. Marketing postcards

Giveaways: With giveaways, think carefully about what items will stick around in people’s homes the longest. For example, USB memory sticks, magnets, and “chip clips” (everything with the library’s URL on it) will likely always be sought after and used.

Surveys: By having your users fill out a survey, you reap the benefits of awareness and also get important feedback. For example, if your library does a survey about the usefulness of RefWorks, the survey announcement itself may raise awareness of the existence of RefWorks. In the same way, the survey questions may raise awareness of underused features of a resource (“How often do you use RefWorks folders to organize citations?”). And you learn more about your user population.

source (“How often do you use RefWorks folders to organize citations?”). And you learn more about your user population.

Evaluating Your Marketing Efforts

This article has presented numerous techniques for getting the word out about the online library. Which ones are worth the time? By evaluating marketing efforts, you can choose which techniques to continue, change, or cease.

Key performance indicators for your website: With so many web statistics available to you, it’s important to identify key performance indicators for your website’s mission. According to Eric Peterson’s *Web Analytics Demystified*, sites with a customer-service-oriented mission will likely care the most about the following indicators:

- ▶▶▶▶ Overall traffic volume—measures visitors’ desire for support
- ▶▶▶▶ Page “stickiness” and percentage of visits under 90 seconds—visitors should not leave the site right away
- ▶▶▶▶ Website search keywords—what issues are they experiencing?
- ▶▶▶▶ Entry pages—what content are your visitors most interested in?

Landing pages, clickthroughs, and web-server statistics: If you’re using specific landing pages for marketing materials, it’s easy to track their success by looking at web server logs for those specific pages. Did page visits spike after the materials were distributed?



If you're using web advertising such as banner ads on your own website, you can track the number of times users click on the advertisement. And, if you're putting advertisements on other websites such as Facebook or campus webpages, you can look at your web-server statistics to see where users are coming from.

Usage statistics: If you've been marketing a specific resource heavily, it's worth comparing the vendor's usage statistics with those of previous years. A simple way to normalize your statistics is to use the other months of the year for comparison. For example, if you marketed the ERIC database heavily in September and October, and usage was indeed greater than last year's September and October, you could check the increase for July and August to see how much of the increase might be due to other factors.

Surveys: Many websites direct users to an opportunity to take a survey after using the website. The survey window may open in the background so that when the user is done using the resource, he or she sees the survey window. Your library could offer these surveys for specific resources and compare response rates with normal traffic.

Making a Difference With Marketing

By carefully planning and evaluating your library's marketing efforts regarding its virtual presence, you can determine which strategies will get the most bang for your buck. If you can show a real difference with your marketing efforts, your library may be willing to invest more resources into new efforts, form a committee, or even hire a dedicated marketing person. But best of all, you will be helping your library's users connect with the resources they need.



Jody Condit Fagan (faganjc@jmu.edu) is content interfaces coordinator at James Madison University, where she manages web projects relating to the library's collections. She has published numerous journal articles and book chapters relating to libraries and the web and serves as the editor of *The Journal of Web Librarianship*, a peer-reviewed journal. She received her M.L.S. from the University of Maryland–College Park and her M.A. in history from Southern Illinois University–Carbondale.



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ils roundup

compiled by the editors

In Search of the Next-Gen ILS

By now everyone knows what a next-gen OPAC looks like—pretty much like Amazon.com, complete with book jackets, user reviews, and, if not now then some day soon, recommendations based on user data and maybe even a peek inside the pages.

But what's a next-gen ILS? Views and visions abound. We've compiled this roundup of resources to expand your own thinking about the possibilities.

John Blyberg, a self-proclaimed library geek who publishes a blog at www.blyberg.net and is also head of technology and digital initiatives at Darien Library in Connecticut, thinks a next-gen ILS might look like the diagram at right.

See John's complete take on the subject by reviewing his slide show "Freeing the Data" at SlideShare (registration is required; membership is free): www.slideshare.net/jblyberg/freeing-the-data-implementing-the-nextgen-catalogue.

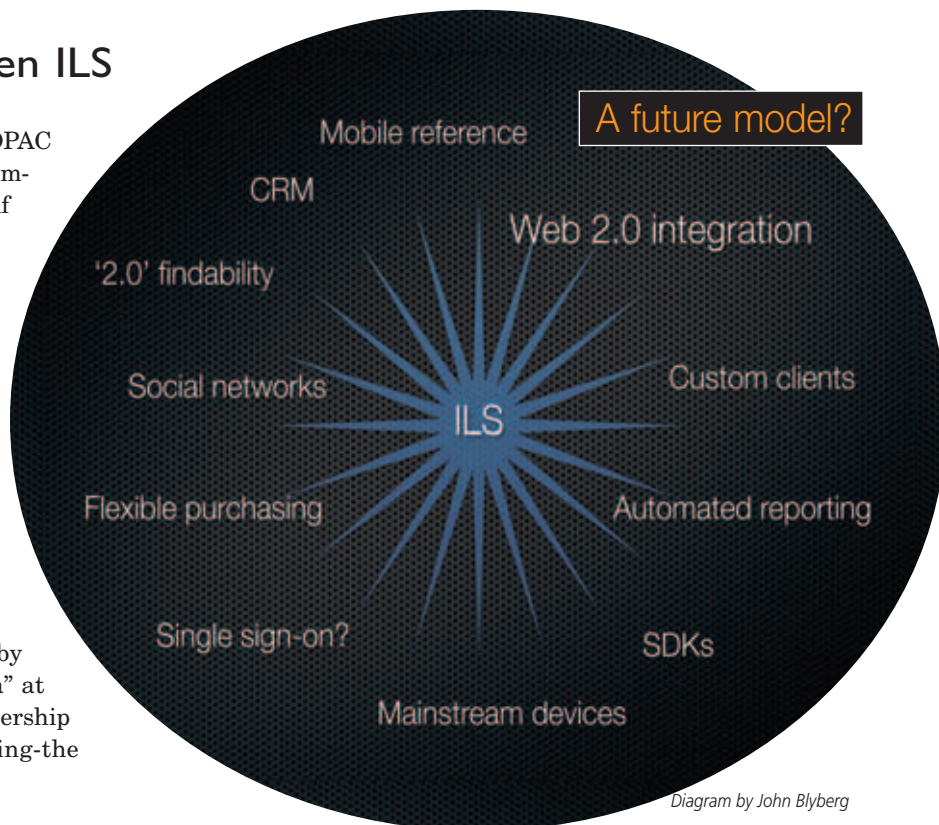


Diagram by John Blyberg

Revise assumptions regarding Metadata

- Release on MARC widely questioned
- XML widely deployed
- The next-gen ILS must actively support a of metadata: MARC, Dublin Core, OAI, RSS / ATOM
- Libraries demand more openness

Less Proprietary / More Open

Working toward a new ILS Vision

- How libraries work has changed dramatically over the last 20 years
- ILS built largely on workflows cast more than 25 years ago
- Based on assumptions that have long since changed
- Digital resources represent at least half of most libraries' collection budgets

Our own columnist Marshall Breeding (Vanderbilt University) does a great job of explaining why our collective concept of integrated library systems needs to evolve. Marshall was the lead speaker on the subject at a symposium sponsored by Lincoln Trail Libraries System (Champaign, Ill.) about a year ago. His remarks on the subject are still seminal. You'll also find a lot of rich resources at the conference site, including podcasts of all the presentations at that event and copies of all the presentations. A wealth of angles and points of view are included.

Summary of Breeding's remarks:

<http://lincolntail.typepad.com/ilssymposium/2007/09/marshall-breedi.html>

Podcast of Marshall's talk:

<http://lincolntail.typepad.com/ilssymposium/2007/09/marshall-bree-2.html>

Link to the symposium blog including other talks from leading thinkers on the subject:

<http://lincolntail.typepad.com/ilssymposium>

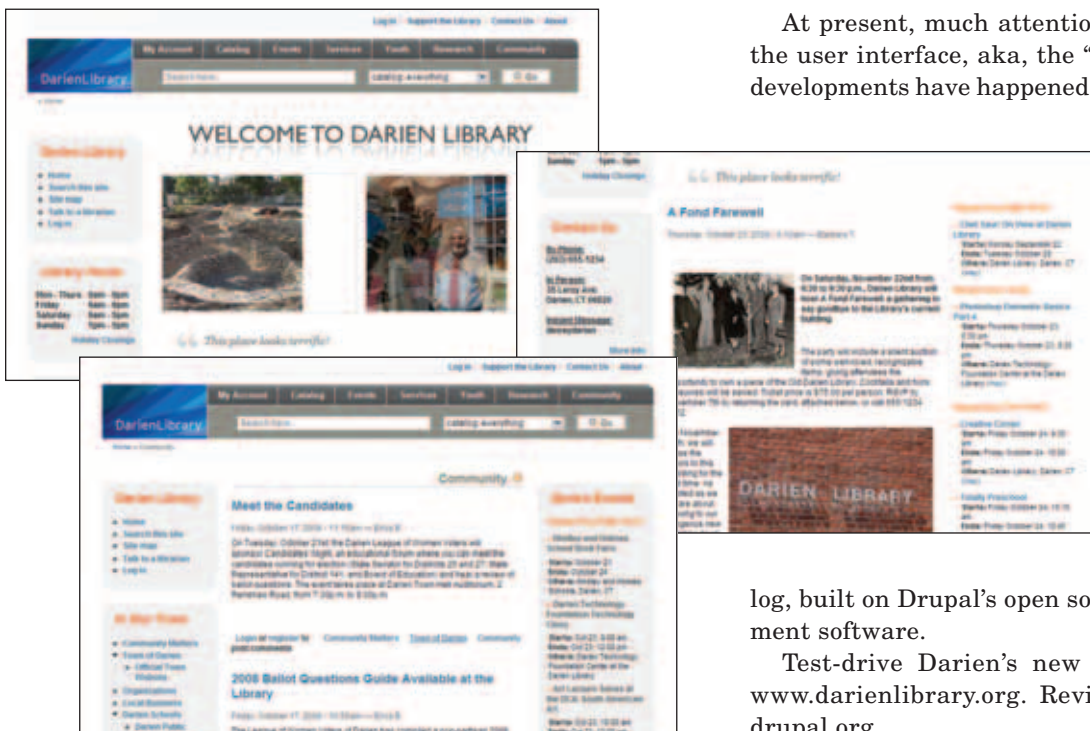


Much hope for a bright ILS future has been vested in the workings of a group called the DLF ILS Discovery Interface Task Force, which was convened by the Digital Library Federation in 2007 to examine how ILS and other discovery systems can be integrated. The group's draft recommendations were published last year and can be reviewed at the group's wiki (<https://project.library.upenn.edu/confluence/display/ilsapi/Draft+Recommendation>) or at the Digital Library Federation's website (<http://diglib.org/architectures/ilsdi>). A new version (based on discussions last fall) may be coming soon, but it is said to contain only minor revisions.

The task force based its official recommendations on a document known as the Berkeley Accord, which was developed by the group in cooperation with leading ILS and OPAC vendors, including Talis, Ex Libris, LibLime, BiblioCommons, Sirsi-Dynix, Polaris Information Systems, VTLS, OCLC, California Digital Library, and AquaBrowser. Vendors have recently reviewed the latest draft, making only minor modifications.

The report recommends basic discovery interfaces and specifies a "Level 1" interoperability profile. Much work lies ahead.

The task force says these efforts will ultimately "allow libraries to deploy new discovery services to meet ever-growing user expectations in the Web 2.0 era, [to] take full advantage of advanced ILS data management and services, and [to] encourage a strong, innovative community and marketplace in next-generation library management and discovery applications."



At present, much attention remains focused on the user interface, aka, the "next-gen OPAC," and developments have happened rapidly in the last few years. Most commercial ILS vendors have an answer, but some libraries are still opting to customize their front ends with open source solutions. The Darien Public Library (Conn.) has caught attention recently for its contemporary web-based catalog, built on Drupal's open source content management software.

Test-drive Darien's new web-based OPAC at www.darienlibrary.org. Review Drupal at <http://drupal.org>.

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