Library Portal: Role of Librarian

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Abstract

This paper emphasizes the significance, elements and functionality of library portals, the role of librarian as selector and organizer of information on the web. The portal offers the user the ease of searching many sources at once, integrating results from licensed resources and local databases and bibliographical descriptions of digitized material. Equally, the familiar portal interface is an option for searching databases that are unfamiliar to the users. Librarians bring their expertise with content, their knowledge of copyright, their commitment to customer service and their experience in creating customized web-based information delivery systems.

Keywords

Library Portal, Content management, Portal elements.

0. Introduction

The term "portal" describes a variety of web based interfaces, everything from a relatively static homepage with general product and contact information to a dynamic one-stop homepage where users can customize the content to meet their needs. For many portal is the epicenter of the web experience, a place to return to when you get lost, a place to keep your information, a place from which to communicate with others. The Joint Information Systems Committee defines a portal as "a network service that brings together content from diverse distributed resources using technologies such as cross searching, harvesting and altering, and collates this in to an amalgamated form for presentation via a web browser to the user". A library portal is a single access point combining the library catalogues, subscription databases, subject gateways, electronic journals etc. Library portal meets the individual needs of users, which either the system itself can tailor the delivery and presentation of information content or the users themselves can customize the type and format of information displayed. Library portal is now the standard interface to generate library resources and services through a single access and management point for users.

1. Significance of Library Portal

Librarians have become increasingly aware that the multiplication of electronic resources is a problem for end-users. Users find it difficult to locate the most appropriate database or resource to search for information relevant to their need. Even if they locate the right resources, since each service tends to have its own

unique interface, they may struggle to search it effectively. If information is difficult to find using library tools and services, users are looking for alternative sources. This new reality translates into the need for making library web environments effective and useful. This trend is especially challenging for librarians, who were and continue to see themselves as the traditional keepers of knowledge, which until very recently was housed in many millions of books and journals that are rapidly becoming digitized. Portals are transformational environments that address the problem of information glut by customizing information content to meet specific end-user needs.

Library portal is growing in its importance as the preferred way of organizing and using information. Web portals are seen as positive potential frameworks for achieving order out of chaos. As portals become a primary means for transacting information and commerce, libraries of all types are becoming involved in thinking, planning and building various frameworks and services. Library portal reduce the barrier of users having to remember multiple log-ons. The portal gives the library a tool to channel users towards preferred resources. It increases the ability of the library to ensure that costly electronic journals and databases are used, by offering a simple way to browse the available resources. It supports searching by carrying users through from bibliographic searches to full text options.

2. Elements of Library Portal

The library portals are changing rapidly, but some of the major elements to be considered while designing the library portal are as follows,

2.1 Ease-of Use

The foremost feature to be considered is the ease-of-use, which can be determined by the effectively organized home page. The ease with which the users find information depends upon the multiple paths provided to find information, at the same time, keeping the number of clicks to a minimum in finding pertinent information. The user should perceive ease-of-use with the accessibility and usability of library portal, so as to interact with the system quite often. Text should be kept terse and lucid, so that user can scan and locate the needed information quickly and sometimes, obscured information they seek.

2.2 Search and Navigation

In addition to consistent and logical navigation framework, effective search functionality and site maps are mandatory in the homepage. Direct access to the commonly used services needs to be supported by the library portal, as the users expect to have the capability to complete tasks online. Search boxes are preferable to search buttons and need to be placed in a prominent location.

2.3 Resource Linking

Resource linking allows a library to seamlessly tie electronic resources together. For example, an index or abstract can be linked to a full-text database or a bibliographic record can be linked to a review or to an e-book. Users may like to have more than one path to find the same information, cross linking ensures that the users would find the information they are looking for.

2.4 Personalization

Each individual user or a community and/or group of users can have settings for each of the portal functions that they use. A portal provides a framework for users to store the settings and tailor the content that they are interested in seeing. A portal can be personalized using user-profile to deliver personalized content. Each user can gain a view that is tailored to his or her access privileges. User has to sign on with a username and Personal Identification Number on entry to the library portal to access personal profile information and tailor the design based on customization feature. Or else, a portal may give users the ability to create their personalized pages by selecting what they want to see whenever they get access to the library portal. This personal page may keep track of resources for a user, his library account, queries kept until the session ends, request and reserves and also renewals.

2.5 User Authentication

User authentication also known as patrons authentication determines whether patrons are eligible for service by checking patrons against a library database. This authentication is usually done with a proxy server to limit access to resources the patron is authorized to use. For example a library may allow anyone to access its catalog, its community information file and other locally created files on its web server, or it may limit access to subscription databases to only registered borrowers.

2.6 Interactive Services

Although most portals can support interactive services, only a few academic libraries have incorporated interactive services in to their portal. Typical of such services are e-mail, chat rooms and forums. Library portal should facilitate knowledge sharing online by providing collaborative space for interactive tools. However, in order to assist the users in the fair use of tools and services offered, library portal should facilitate web based information literacy programs.

3. Core Functionality of the Library Portal

- Searching would be far easier for the user if the library could present resources in a consistent, organized gateway. This should be customized for different user groups.
- Users would learn to search more effectively if there is one fully functional library maintained search interface available for any database they wanted to use.
- It would often be convenient to search multiple databases from one search box. This implies the ability, in a single search, to interrogate databases that use different metadata standards, especially in different curatorial domains.
- Specifically the system should be able to search databases of images and a proliferating array of multimedia types, and ideally show thumbnails or previews in search results.
- The search results from spread searches need to be presented in an intelligible way to the user, ideally with de-duplication and sorting of results.
- The system must understand licenses, such that it only offers options to users that are available to them, based on their access rights and the license, although it can help create awareness and drive demand for protected resources through alerting, personalization and customization functions.
- Link resolution services should be supported. That is rather than pointing at specific static URLs for content, web requests should pass through an intermediary service where a final URL is calculated for any resource at the time of the user accessing it. This offers a scaleable way to manage constantly changing URLs and the opportunity to develop further middleware support services.
- The user should be able to save hits or searches, including for reuse on databases other than the one it was first created for.
- Another central requirement is that there should be a single point of authentication. The user must not be constantly challenged for a password, in fact cross searching of multiple access controlled datasets is impractical without some sort of single sign on or caching of credentials or trust between servers.
- The system must provide central management tools for handling a variety of http based query syntaxes, since standards are developing rapidly to meet the needs of specific domains.

4. Role of Librarian

As educators who organize and evaluate information resources, academic librarians bring unique perspectives and skills to the development of portals in

their colleges and universities to campus portal planning and implementation, they bring their expertise with content, their knowledge of copyright, their commitment to customer service, and their experience in creating customized web-based information delivery systems.

4.1 Content

Academic librarians provide credible content that has been selected for a specific learning community. Their library's homepages and collections have what every web site wants: brand and content. Libraries have the brand name of the academic institution they serve and content that has been customized to meet the needs of their users. To students who may have difficulty determining what is valuable and what is useless on the web, the library offers a safe harbor in a flood of information. Increasingly the content of libraries is in digital form and is composed of databases. Click on any library homepage and you will find an array of databases selected to support the academic programs offered by the institution. These databases are made available both on and off campus through licenses arranged through the library.

4.2 Copyright

Librarian's knowledge of current copyright policy is being called upon now more than ever in setting up electronic reserves and online information for learning portals created using blackboard and other web-based course management systems. Faculty and students may assume that if educational material is on the web, no copyright restrictions apply. However, this is true only if the copyright for the work has expired, its author has allowed the work to go into the public domain, or the work was authored by the federal government. Since there is a mix of works in the public domain and under copyright on the internet and some works under copyright are posted without authorization, it is not always clear which are in the public domain. Librarians provide guidance in determining which web-based materials are under copyright and seek permission for use of these works with the Copyright Clearance Center and other agencies. Librarians inform faculty about the fair use guidelines.

4.3 Customer Service

As libraries make more digital resources available on the Web, research is increasingly conducted outside of the physical library. However, remote users want interactive assistance from a qualified human being and not just a help button to click on. Librarians have developed a number of ways to extend person-to-person reference service in a digital environment that are applicable in supporting portal use on campus. Digital Reference Services (DRS) offer quality service at any time to users outside the library. DRS refer to all internet-based, human-mediated information services, including those based in library settings

and other types of organizations. Such services range from e-mail reference which libraries have offered for years, to online reference chat which many librarians are now implementing.

5. Conclusion

Most library patrons want information regardless of where they find it. They don't want to limit themselves to their library's collection. A portal offers them one-stop shopping that takes them from the initial need for information through its delivery without having to use several different tools. If well designed, a portal also provides effective navigation of complex, multiple collections. Over the past decade, academic librarians have been evaluators, selectors, and organizers of information on the web. Our experience and expertise make us valuable players in a team approach in planning and implementing library portals. An interactive service such as "Ask a Librarian" can make requesting assistance simple and convenient by connecting web users with librarians.

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