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Representation of Atypical Resources in the Discovery Layer: Metadata and Cataloging Aspects

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Abstract

The discovery layer is commonly used in libraries to provide a more “Google-like” experience that offers one-stop searching. The original selling point of the discovery layer was that journal articles could be retrieved as well as monographs. But as libraries have acquired many other formats, particularly nonprint ones, the discovery layer has struggled to provide results that include these “atypical” resources.

Metadata is crucial to the discovery layer because it is what is used for the search. The higher the quality of metadata, the better the retrieval results will be. NISO has provided a list of elements to be considered best practices when creating metadata for the discovery layer.

Not everything a library has available can be found through the discovery layer. This is a particular problem for those items that have their metadata stored only in an institutional repository. These repositories are often not loaded into the discovery layer.

Solving discovery layer retrieval problems will take all parties working together on solutions. Then all relevant results can be delivered, and fulfill the goal of “one-stop” searching.

Background

Joan M. Reitz defines the discovery layer, which she calls a discovery service in the entry in her *Online Dictionary for Library and Information Science*, as “A single interface, providing integrated access to the multiple information resources (catalogs, publishers’ e-book and e-journal collections, subscription databases, archival collections) to which a library has rights” (Reitz, n.d.).

Access to journal articles along with books has been a prime selling point of discovery services, but more atypical resources are being included in the services. These resources can include maps, audiovisual items, image collections, and statistical databases.

In order for someone to be able to discover any of these resources, there has to be a means to the discovery. It’s the metadata in the records loaded into the layer that allows for this.

Records loaded can come from a library’s online catalog or other repository. They also can be created by the provider of the content accessed in the discovery layer.

The University of South Florida (USF) has records from both sources in its discovery layer. Records

from its online catalog are loaded into the service by FALSC, the state agency that coordinates library automation for each of the public colleges and universities in Florida. Updates are loaded each night, with a full reload done once a week.

Records from the USF catalog are supplemented in the discovery service by those from other sources, such as content providers. The USF catalog provides item-level records for most monographs, maps, scores, and audio and video recordings. But it provides only title-level access to journals, image collections, and databases. Metadata to allow access to individual items within each of these sources can be found in the discovery layer.

Metadata in the Discovery Layer

Since the metadata comes from varying sources, it can be of varying quality, and could affect retrieval results. The more high-quality metadata provided for each item, the better the retrieval results delivered to the searcher. Conversely, incomplete metadata can result in a searcher not retrieving some relevant results because the appropriate terms were not included in the metadata.

NISO, the National Information Standards Organization, is attempting to remedy the problem of varying

quality by offering to content providers a set of best practices when creating metadata. These best practices appear in its report *Open Discovery Initiative: Promoting Transparency in Discovery*.

NISO recommends the following as core elements to be included in discovery layer records: title, author, publisher, date, item ID, item URL, and content type (National Information Standards Organization [NISO], 2014, p. 16).

The report also includes elements that can be used as enriched content to improve the search experience for users: indexing data (keywords from controlled or uncontrolled vocabularies), full text (for print items) or transcript (for audio or video content, if applicable), and an abstract for print items or description for nontext materials (NISO, 2014, p. 19).

The Problem of Institutional Repositories

Sometimes problems with retrieving relevant material from a discovery layer lie not in the quality of the metadata, but in its total absence. This can happen with material, particularly atypical resources, located in a library's institutional repository.

These kinds of resources in an institutional repository have been digitized by the institution and placed in the repository with accompanying metadata. Item-level descriptions for these resources are found in the repository, but not in the library's online catalog. Material in institutional repositories is often not loaded into the discovery layer and therefore cannot be retrieved there.

Thus, audio recordings, video, image collections, and other material that could be of value to researchers are left out of discovery layer search results. These materials are accessible to patrons, but they have to know to search in the institutional repository to find them.

If records from the institutional repository could be loaded into the discovery layer, the problem would

be solved. But this is not always easy to do, as the University of South Florida found out. Attempts to load records from the USF institutional repository into the discovery layer have produced inconsistent and unreliable results when trying to retrieve, for example, images for which the metadata exists only in the repository.

Whether the problem lay with USF, the discovery layer vendor, or the third party that loaded the records into the discovery layer, the result was that too many institutional repository records remained siloed and unavailable for discovery in the discovery layer.

At USF, and probably many more libraries, the discovery layer is the first search interface a patron sees when coming to the library website. Searching only the library's catalog or the institutional repository takes extra steps.

The discovery layer is favored because it provides a more "Google-like" search experience. Patrons supposedly can do one-stop searching. But they are not retrieving all the relevant results in this one stop.

Working Toward Solutions

Resolving discovery layer problems will take intensive collaboration. To quote from the *Open Discovery Initiative*, "The trend toward index-based discovery requires cooperation between content providers, discovery service providers, and libraries to ensure that the broadest spectrum of materials can be fully exposed through discovery platforms" (NISO, 2014, p. 15).

If a library held only monographs and journals, a discovery service as presently constituted would be sufficient, provided there was adequate metadata for all entries. But today's libraries hold many other formats, and these resources, which are now thought of as atypical in the discovery layer, should be on an equal footing in discovery with their more traditional cousins.

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