

California Digital Library
Metasearch Infrastructure Project Talking Points

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These “talking points” are to assist CDL and campus staff in justifying and supporting the Metasearch Infrastructure Project. For more information on this project, see the project web site at <<http://www.cdlib.org/inside/projects/metasearch/>>.

From: Luther, Judy. “The Players,” Library Journal, October 1, 2003, <<http://libraryjournal.com/article/CA322627>> .

“At its heart, metasearch is about providing easy access for the user to complex resources. It is not a tool that allows librarians—or other expert users—to search with greater precision. It’s not for us, it’s for the average user.”

Goal for our users: Search Less, Find More

Studies have shown...

From UC Berkeley Library’s Website Redesign Focus Group Study, Spring 2003:

- “Participants would prefer to run one search and get results back from a variety of sources.”
- “Their [users’] heartfelt and oft-repeated advice to us was ‘simplify, simplify, simplify.’”
- “There is a desire for having a search box fairly prominent on all screens, with some obvious explanation of what domains the search will address.”
- “Participants were very interested in a site that could provide them with integrated subject access to materials in their fields, including “key sources,” survey papers, and specialized encyclopedias.”

From CDL’s focus groups with undergrads:

- I would like to search multiple sources all at once
- I would like to type in what you are looking for and get back databases that would have the stuff come back, based on your search term.
- I don’t know where to begin – where to start. You go to the library, but you have different search engines. If you just know about Gladis (UC Berkeley’s catalog), you might not know about the other stuff. If could do journal searching in one place, that would be good.
- So many searches, which do you use first? I want to search across PsycINFO, but it would have been nice to be able to search across PsycINFO, sociology, and women’s studies

What Metasearch is not

- The perfect tool
- Always precise in what it retrieves
- A replacement for librarians, whose knowledge of databases will always be deeper and richer than an unmediated tool can ever be
- Not necessarily for use in Reference where there’s a librarian available to offer customized expertise, but can be used in instruction, presented as a tool when no face-to-face or other help is available; to be placed on highly visible websites where it can be discovered by users who never make it to the reference desk

CDL Metasearch Talking Points

What Metasearch is

- A way to **help minimize what the user needs to know** at the outset of searching
- **A starting point** for novice users or users unfamiliar with the breadth of databases in a particular field; **a way to discover** some databases when beginning research
- **A common search interface** for users when they first encounter new databases
- A service that campus libraries or subject areas can **customize for distinctive subject areas—content mix can be easily changed**
- **Can be used for deep integration** in learning management systems
- Can help us **surface expensive tools** like subject encyclopedias
- **A tool that builds on former UC cross database search services** including UCSD's Database Advisor and CDL's SearchLight

SmartStart (a search tool for undergraduates, or those out of their field of expertise)

Goals, as reflected in some of the following taglines:

- Find more search less...without being overwhelmed
- Find more...when a few good things are enough
- Search less... by using a single search system that combines scholarly materials with Google
- Search less... by using a simple search interface
- Search less...by having to make fewer choices
- Give users a simple and easy first experience; encourage them to return for more depth and breadth as their needs increase.
- Good first experience = richer experience in the future

Subject-Specific Portals

From Abrams, Stephen, "The Google Opportunity." Library Journal, February 1, 2005.
< <http://libraryjournal.com/article/CA498846> >

"Invent targeted search The days of little boxes and just basic and advanced search and display are so last century. Users will demand search and display options that match their needs and information literacy levels. Display results will evolve beyond simple ranked lists—and libraries have the opportunity to offer ad-free results! Technological solutions such as those presented by Convera, Northern Light, Vivisimo, Endeca, Sirsi Rooms, and Anacubis's TouchGraph offer insights into the future of specialized search and display.

We also have to get search down to the context of the question. Users shouldn't have to search the entire universe of knowledge in a single commercial engine. Nor should they have to search dozens of repositories serially. **We should offer users the ability to search just the content sets that match their needs and literacy levels. Federated search technologies and link resolvers provide solutions to address the context of users' needs."**

CDL Metasearch Talking Points

The goal of subject-specific portals is to enable more advanced users to predictably discover resources from discipline to discipline. Users may (or may not) come to know the resources available in their own fields. But what about when they need to know the resources in a new area? Librarians are the key to carefully selecting and surfacing the best resources in their areas of expertise for easy discovery by users. What if searching in new areas could be simpler?

What one faculty member said in a CDL interview, summer 2004:

“It’s a headache to find journal articles. You need to make that less painful. Searching is hard.”

From UC Berkeley Library’s Website Redesign Focus Group Study, Spring 2003:

“Each focus group surfaced the idea of offering “views” that sifted and reduced all possible links into those links most relevant to an individual user.”

“Participants commented that the site should be clearly organized and should ‘give progressively more detailed information as the user drills down.’”

From CDL’s focus groups with graduate students, summer 2004:

- Would like to see selected materials vetted by librarians – e.g. images, data, from the best sites, well-presented like the Librarians’ Index to the Internet (<http://lii.org/>)
- Would like to see collections presented in “levels”: 1st level would be primary sources, images or data; 2nd level would be links to librarian or peer reviewed sites (e.g. Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, University of Texas, Austin (<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/>)); 3rd level would be Google/general public resources.
- Usually finds out about new sources “by accident” – goes through alphabetical lists, by email/word of mouth from other grad students.
- Support **advanced search** and filtering

The librarian can determine what the user searches maximizing the use of underutilized resources, including licensed resources, a select group of harvested web sites, specialized (and often expensive) subject encyclopedias, image databases and a myriad of other resources. Metasearch can be just one in a librarian’s suite of tools, and may be a way to reach users who don’t come in to the library or ask for help.

In general

- It can be used as a time saver in the world of fewer librarians—as a place to begin doing research (“Start here!”); can be used by bibliographers as well as instruction librarians
- It may change students’ perceptions of libraries; students may view libraries as more responsive to their desires (based on focus groups and other assessment techniques)
- Market it as a lure to bring students to the Library, to the reference desk, and to librarians
- It can be used as opening a door to begin a conversation about library resources
- It can introduce students to databases beyond their favorites
- It can lead users to the more powerful native interfaces
- It can be used as a simpler message for instruction—avoid overloading students

CDL Metasearch Talking Points

- Be creative in deciding where it's appropriate to be placed
- Push it in places beyond the library where students go, e.g., writing centers, student learning centers
- It can be used as a bridge to the library when embedded in courseware
- Add it to "How to do Research" pages
- Figure out how to syndicate, use in RSS feeds
- It can be customized for your own needs
- It will be campus branded and flexible in what it contains, unlike SearchLight
- It can be used as an opportunity to work with faculty to customize it for a specific field or subfield
- It's an evolving tool; we want to work with you on improving it; it's not a finished product; it's your tool

Again, from: Luther, Judy. "The Players," Library Journal, October 1, 2003, <<http://print.google.com/print/doc?articleid=I9A0Q3fm1IC>> .

"In academic libraries nationwide, the same conversation is taking place between librarians who don't want the interface "dumbed down" and librarians with usability practice who know that patrons basically want the Google experience. It's time for librarians to accept that library users are not interested in being more like us. If we don't understand that the majority of our users are novice searchers who may wish to remain that way, we are missing the opportunity to serve the pragmatic user who is happy with a "good enough" answer. "

"Three big issues remain for librarians. They must understand metasearch's potential role in serving their users, rethink how the library's resources are presented, and develop realistic expectations of this evolving technology."