

Amazon: complement or competition to OPACs

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Amazon and libraries

- Amazon as book and media vendor
- Selling unwanted books through Amazon Marketplace
- Buying used instead of ILL
- Linking to Amazon from OPAC
- ...
- Amazon as model for better OPACs
- Amazon as front-end of OPACs

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Criticism of library catalogues...

- C. Borgman: "...are (still) hard to use"
- M. Bates: "Improving user access to library catalog and portal information"
- "How we provide bibliographic services for the University of California"
(libraries.universityofcalifornia.edu/sopag/BSTF/Final.pdf)

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From the report

- The current library catalog is poorly designed for the tasks of finding, discovering, and selecting the growing set of resources available in our libraries. It is best at locating and obtaining a known item
- Our users expect simplicity and immediate reward and Amazon, Google, and iTunes are the standards against which we are judged. Our current systems pale beside them

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Too harsh?

- Overstated criticism?
- Libraries are perceived as old-fashioned?
- Libraries are not perceived as primary information providers?
- Opinion of non-users?

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But...

Reports of using Amazon as front-end:

First, I search for the book on Amazon.com. Every book always comes up on Amazon.com, while for some reason only about one out of every ten books comes up on the library catalogue. Then, I get the ISBN number off of Amazon. Then, since there is no option to search for a book in the library catalogue by ISBN, I am forced to put the ISBN on the ILL request form and request the book. They are always very good about sending me a judgmental email, telling me to stop requesting books which are already in the BYU library. Happily, they always send me the reference. Where they get it from, I don't know, but until the catalogue is significantly improved, I am forced to continue harassing them.

(from <https://intranet.lib.byu.edu/www/?p=13>)

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Today's (potential) library users

- are WEB-savvy
- have high expectations
- are aware of alternatives in information provision
- are behaving as consumers

Common requirements

- Simplicity
- Direct access to resources
- Relevance ranking
- Help with failed searches
- Browsing/navigation
- Meaningful clustering of large result sets

Advantages of traditional OPACs

- Several interfaces
- Known-item searching
- Subject access
- Authority control
- Consistent metadata

What is offered by Amazon?

- Simple interface
- Book covers
- Recommendations
- Reviews (writing and reading)
- Result ranking
- Searching inside the book
 - TOC
 - index
 - SIPs
 - CAPs

Simple interface

- Expected by many (most) users
- "you always get something"
- Users less concerned with precision

- Is offered under 'keyword searching'

Book covers

- Traditionally underestimated by librarians
- No aspect included in cataloguing rules
- Very important for known-item searching

- Important for 'identify' function

Recommendations

Similarity measures:

- People who buy the same books are similar
- Books bought by the same person are similar

Well known concepts in information science (bibliometrics)

- Bibliographic coupling (Kessler, 1963)
Two documents with common citations
- Co-citation (Small, 1973)
Two documents, cited together

Circulation data?

Reviews

Which aspect is more important?

Users now expect to have an active role

Libraries should support active participation
(discussed in workshops)

Result ranking

- Weakness of traditional OPACs, default arrangement is by date of cataloguing
- Should be investigated
- By popularity?

Availability of content

Possible for digitised and born digital resources

- SIP
 - Statistically Improbable Phrases are the most distinctive phrases in the text of books in the Search Inside!TM program. To identify SIPs, our computers scan the text of all books in the Search Inside! program. If they find a phrase that occurs a large number of times in a particular book relative to all Search Inside! books, that phrase is a SIP in that book.
- CAP
 - Capitalized Phrases are people, places, events, or important topics mentioned frequently in a book
- Enhanced records (TOC added by LC- BEAT)

Implement the best of both worlds:

- Some features of Google and Amazon already implemented
- Enhanced subject access
- Relationships/navigation
- Name authority control

Challenges

- Meaningful clustering of result sets (FRBR!)
- Multilingual and cross-lingual searching
- Avoiding failed searches (spelling control, alternatives)
- Distributed/federated searching

What are we waiting for?