

ELAG 2007: workshop “Subject specific search engines”

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Introduction

This workshop aims at exploring issues related to the development and maintenance of subject specific search engines. The reasoning is that libraries wish to provide high quality search results to their audiences, especially in an academic environment or special library. Generic search engines are developed to deliver quick results from a wide range (in essence unlimited) of websites and other e-resources. Generic search engines therefore deliver generic results, leaving the student and researcher to evaluate and pick the right document or website.

Question at hand: can we provide a better service to our user community by offering them subject specific search engines? If so, how and what does it involve?

Practical case: Develop a subject specific search engine on library automation as part of the ELAG website.

Focuss.eu

Mid 2006 the initiative was launched to develop a subject specific search engine for people working in the area of “development cooperation, education and research”. A prototype was developed, based on Lucene open source, that indexed over 2.000 websites. The websites were selected by librarians of 10 institutes. In addition selected researchers and practitioners added e-resources through a social bookmark site.

The result was presented in September of 2006 at the EADI information management workgroup annual meeting and additional libraries showed their interest.

In November about 15 institutes delivered their websites to the search engine. At that moment Google announced the second version of Customised Search Engine, which was a confirmation to the initiative that we were on the right track.

We converted our websites to Google CSE (took 2 hours) and continued our initiative.

Currently www.focuss.eu indexes over 6.000 websites and more than 20 organisations participate.

Collaboration

The interesting part of the focuss initiative is that there are at least three levels of collaboration:

1. Libraries of academic institutions and NGO's
2. Scholars (researchers, phd) and professionals
3. Currently 8 different countries are involved

Workshop proposal

In our workshop I like to discuss the following questions:

1. Is the subject specific search engine a valid model for library services
2. How specific or broad must a subject be defined
3. Should we rely on commercial providers (Google) or develop our own technology
4. Can quality be guaranteed if librarians and professionals work together?

If we agree on the validity of a subject specific search engine, we may work on a practical case: setting up a subject specific search engine on library automation in Europe (as part of the ELAG website) and invite ELAG participants to join the initiative.