Discovering Summon

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The University of Hull launched its use of the Summon discovery tool in September 2012 (originally as a one-year pilot). Summon™ enables users to search across the majority of the library's electronic resources, covering journal articles, electronic books, web resources and more. The university introduced Summon with a 'soft' launch and little formal promotion. This was designed to afford time for library staff to become familiar with the tool's capabilities and to gauge the potential impact on information literacy (IL) delivery strategies. During the project phase of the implementation it was noted that student engagement with the tool was key and so particular attention was paid, in terms of on-going evaluation, to user experience and usability in relation to Summon itself and other resources. In turn, the introduction of Summon has had implications for IL delivery in terms of both current and future strategies. As Ng (2012) argued, perceived digital natives are not necessarily information natives, and it is the role of those involved in IL delivery to help develop student's skills in this area. Subject to specific discipline requirements and context, a discovery tool offers the opportunity to focus further on creative information exploration, management and exploitation. As a result, IL delivery can make an important contribution to wider university objectives surrounding employability.

Evaluation strategy

A process of on-going evaluation, using both quantitative and qualitative research techniques, was implemented so as to ensure that the way in which Summon was made available to users best served their needs. During the 2012–13 academic year the project group ran focus groups with both academic staff and students, and performed detailed surveys at different stages of the year, with the hope of assessing how the use of the tool was developing. The assessment involved not only the statistics regarding the number of searches performed and how they increased over the months since the service was launched, but also more nuanced analysis of where use of Summon fitted in the undergraduate and post-graduate research process. Initial results indicated that use of Summon gradually increased during the year as users became aware of it, and that it was particularly used as an initial search. This feedback based on focus groups and surveys was then complemented by in-house usability testing. It was recognised that the observation of how users actually used this tool would be fundamental in terms of its on-going promotion and utilisation, in terms of its online presence and IL delivery. Members of the project team invited students to participate in the user-testing in return for coffee vouchers, and the sessions were promoted via the library site and our Twitter feed (@HullUni_Library). Participants were observed working through a series of search scenarios and provided feedback regarding areas of usability, including ease of resource location and access, search-interface orientation, and result management and exportation. The key feedback centred on the promotion and the web-presence of Summon whilst most felt that the basic use of Summon was quite intuitive. As a result of the soft launch of the service students felt that our future strategy should focus firstly on awareness and access, and secondly on advanced Summon search techniques and result management.

The aim of running the usability testing, alongside other evaluation techniques such as focus groups and surveys, was to ensure that by the end of the project phase of Summon implementation, we understood the capabilities of the tool and how we would incorporate it in our teaching and skills development in the future. The key messages from this user engagement influenced how we promoted Summon. As a result, for the 2013–14 academic year, we developed an extensive promotional campaign, producing bookmarks and banners for the library and sending mailshots from both the library and Student Union. The key change was our decision to add the search box to the front of our website and to make it integral throughout our subject LibGuides (which in turn made it an integral part of face-to-face IL deliv-

ery). Thus there was a substantial rise in usage, with searches seeing a 200% increase between October 2012 and October 2013.

IMPACT ON CURRENT AND FUTURE IL DELIVERY

2013–14 saw Summon become an important part of IL delivery. Embedded, face-to-face IL teaching is delivered across the different university faculties and at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Use of relevant subject LibGuides is integral to this instruction in terms of practical demonstration and interactive student engagement. The guides are subject-specific gateways that showcase relevant resources across different information formats. Thus the increased visibility afforded to Summon on the library webpages for the 2013–14 academic year, including on the subject LibGuides, meant that the promotion of Summon, and the advanced skills required to maximise its utility, fitted naturally into our format of IL delivery. That said, careful consideration was given to how use of Summon should be advocated. This varied according to specific-subject requirements and the level of student at each IL session. For example, for certain subject areas it was noted that Summon was not the preferred search tool as some of the large databases were currently not covered. In those instances, this was carefully conveyed to students and so affected the way in which they were advised to use Summon as part of their research strategies. The way Summon was promoted was also influenced by the level of degree being studied and the extent of the research required. Students undertaking postgraduate research, and undergraduates engaging in extended research, were advised in particular to supplement Summon searches with searches of subject-specific and relevant multi-disciplinary resources. Indeed, the broad strategy adopted was an inclusive one, in which use of Summon was combined with the use of other available resources. Thus Summon was promoted as a starting-point to research but not necessarily as an end-point.

At the same time, it was recognised that the search capability of Summon provides an important opportunity to re-focus IL delivery and move away from solely demonstrating different interfaces and communicating search rules and conventions. It enables a greater concentration on teaching generic skills of information discovery and utilisation and so encouraging students to become confident and creative critical thinkers in the way they search for and use information across different resource environments. Sessions can also be used to encourage students to evaluate the effectiveness of their own searches, particularly when assessing questions of currency, objectivity, accuracy and authority; and the potential role of a discovery tool could play in providing Google-like functionality, but with the greater assurance of information provenance which library resources provide. This potentially enables sessions to become more student-led and interactive. As the 2011 NMC Horizon Report advocates we as IL educators will have to develop students' skills in critical thinking and problem solving (Johnson et al, 2011). Thus, the role of IL delivery at the University of Hull can be seen as evolving from aiding students in the discovery of information to ensuring that they are able to navigate the huge amount of content available to them. In this way IL delivery can also promote attainment of important employability skills.

REFERENCES

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