Foreword

The time is ripe for a thorough discussion of resource discovery tools in the academic library environment; and not merely an offering of practical advice on selection and implementation, but also a critical analysis of why such tools have gained importance in the marketplace, their affordances, and their limitations. Framing this discussion are two critical shifts in how academic libraries view the information discovery landscape, both driven by recent trends in user behavior and design practice, as well as the continuing development of the discovery tool market itself.

A move from the disjointed world of Online Public Access Catalogs (OPACs) and native database interfaces to the discovery layer represents a significant shift in focus from the primacy of content and its providers to that of the user and the needs of scholars. Changes in the expectations users bring to the discovery experience, brought on by faster, more satisfying interactions with mass market search engines (think Google) and the consumer Web (think Amazon), extend academic libraries' attention past content provision to ensuring that resources are easily discoverable and accessible within an increasingly networked scholarly life. This shift from content-centeredness to user-centeredness is abetted by the rise of user-centered design and usability assessment, which push academic libraries toward more flexible discovery environments featuring more agile architectures and continual cycles of innovation, testing, and improvement.

In the networked world, academic libraries must expand their conceptions of information discovery beyond the development and implementation of local tools by exposing their data to search engines and providing functional paths to local resources from the open Web, where scholars increasingly live, work, and initiate the discovery process. This shift in focus from local tools to the exposure of underlying data is amplified by a move by many academic libraries to decouple back-end inventory and data systems from end-user interfaces, in concept if not in practice. While functionality and cost remain major concerns, the quality of the data underlying a discovery platform has emerged as a key purchasing consideration. The emergence of flexible, open source front-end platforms (think Blacklight) fuels the schism between interface and infrastructure, leading many academic libraries to question long-standing vendor relationships and historical patterns of platform lock-in.

So, if discovery is now centered on the user and enabling data, how does an academic library work through the process of selecting, implementing, and assessing a resource discovery system? How does a library sort through the alternatives to find the best match for its distinctive operating environment, be it at a research university, a community college, or on a liberal arts campus? *Planning and Implementing Discovery Tools in Academic Libraries* is an important attempt to provide guidance for navigating these waters, delivering practical advice on selecting and implementing a discovery tool, as well as critical

discussions of current offerings and the potential value implementing a discovery system might bring to an academic library and its users.

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