

Enhancing library services with user behavior data from Discovery systems

By Alicia Copp Mökkönen.

Roën Janyk, Web Services Librarian at Okanagan College presented findings of research she has conducted on user behavior at the 2014 BC Library conference. Her presentation slides are available at: haikudeck.com/p/tXmjDAFEru

When discovery searching was introduced at Okanagan College, Roën Janyk, Web Services Librarian, was curious about how this would impact student search behaviors. She soon realized that vendor-supplied data was not going to reveal the information she was looking for, because as she explained, "we don't really need to know how many searches have been done, or how many full-text downloads there has been." While vendor statistics provide "uniform information to compare across platforms" this information informs cost. The result? According to Janyk, "We know if they are not using resources but we don't know how they are using our resources." Thus, low usage statistics may at times reveal a user behavior problem rather than a resource problem.

In order to get at the information she was seeking, Janyk utilized Google Analytics which provided an easy avenue for tracking demographics and even live searches. Some of her findings were unexpected. Surprisingly, few visitors accessed the discovery search with mobile devices: 46,000 users accessed it using a desktop computer, 1,000 users accessed it with a tablet and only 52 accessed it with a mobile device. Predictably, of those using tablets, 93% used an iPad. From a pool of over 97,000 unique searches, the top searches were: margaret laurence, bottled water, global warming, Othello, water, starbucks, gender. A bit further down the list we find margaret and laurence, bottled and water. These search terms revealed that students were not using quotation marks around phrases, and significantly, search terms were dictated by assignments. Students were also not aware that the EBSCO Discovery layer automatically links terms with "and". After examining the range of search terms, Janyk began to question whether such a wide range of resources should be purchased when students are using so few of them. She suggested that we consider redirecting funds into

specialized resources tailored more specifically to curriculum.

One of the most interesting findings Janyk presented was that students rarely get past the second page of search results and on average they will only look at about six detailed records. More sophisticated searches (as judged by the use of an asterisk or quotation marks) resulted in more page views. However, only 37% of searches were refined. Janyk highlighted the importance of effective search skills stating, "The more successful students are at finding results the less likely they are to leave." Her findings also have implications for the ranking of resources within a discovery layer.

So what were students actually typing into the search box? Students were typing in the names of databases, in many cases databases that are utilized by the discovery search such as PsycINFO. They were also typing in citation styles such as APA and MLA. Even worse, Janyk observed that students were, for the most part, not developing keywords or a search strategy prior to starting. Janyk explained, students were taking the "same approach to research as Google [...] Type something in and hope for best." Furthermore, students were also using "natural language," using complete sentences rather than keywords or phrases. Janyk recommended focusing instruction on phrase searching, limiters, stop words, and suggested forgoing the instruction on Boolean search logic that is rarely applied by students anyways.

By examining user behaviors, Janyk was able to make recommendations in regards to the timing of instruction, the focus of instruction, collections development, and web design. Janyk closed with this humbling sentiment – "Rather than what we think they should know, we need to look at what they're currently doing and see how we can get them to where we want them to be."

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