

NASIG Newsletter

Vol. 30, no. 2

May 2015

eISSN 1542-3417

Serials & E-Resources News

Electronic Outages: Who Broke It? How Long Was It Broken? We're...Tracking That, Right? Report from ALA Midwinter 2015

Presented and reported by Jennifer Wright

In the rush to fix electronic outages as swiftly as possible, it can be easy to miss connections and overall trends in favor of focusing on the most pressing concern—restoring access to users. Resolving issues is often an all-consuming process, so opportunities to address overarching themes and long-standing issues with particular resources are often missed. This presentation provided an overview of the newly-implemented tracking process for electronic resources at the University of Michigan that allows for collecting greater and more detailed data on the performance of electronic resources. While the data results assist with future purchasing decisions, they also raise questions about where responsibility lies when it comes to unresolved, long-standing issues that are known to all parties (publishers, content providers, and institutions). There are many examples of these unresolved issues, such as faulty metadata distributed widely across the purchasing environment, holdings maintenance as ownership of resources changes hands, and the functioning (or lack thereof) of OpenURL link resolvers with open access content and bundled abstracts and reviews.

After several months of testing, the University of Michigan's implementation of Footprints rolled out in spring of 2013. There were many decisions to be made

during the implementation, such as: what vendors and outage types to track; deciding whether to adopt a priority system; the extent to which to utilize the timer; how to rationalize the policy decisions of other workspaces within the outages workspace; and when to enact dynamic vs. static linking. Having a programmer well-versed in the creation of Footprints implementations across the Library greatly aided both the planning stages, as well as the few months of growing pains prior to the production phase.

Initial findings provided a number of surprises. While memorably thorny to resolve, problems regarding the proxy server comprise a small fraction of total outages. Additionally, those vendors or outage types that seemed to occur quite often through observation were actually not always frequent according to the statistical data. For example, because of the inability to fix bundled content issues, tracking them and providing the appropriate response does not take long, and they do not loom large in the troubleshooters' consciousness. Bundled content problems account for a great number of outages experienced, but they remain unfixed either by content providers or link resolver vendors. A number of outage types previously undistinguishable as an "other" free-text problem type field have been highlighted for separate categories of their own in the future. These include: User Error (where there is in fact no outage); Temporary Glitch (where the outage was momentary and unable to be reproduced by the time troubleshooters came to fix it); and Concurrent User Limits (where users are unable to access a resource because the maximum number of

users are already viewing the resource). All in all, the case study serves to highlight prominent and long-standing access issues regarding electronic resources in large institutional libraries.