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Serials & E-Resources News

NASIG Webinar: Troubleshooting Electronic Resources with ILL Data

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Beth Ashmore, metadata librarian for serials and electronic resources at Samford University Library and co-author of the book *The Librarian's Guide to Negotiation*, gave a presentation entitled "Troubleshooting Electronic Resources with ILL Data." She opened with describing a common experience when PMID (PubMed Identifier) searches were not functional after her library switched knowledge bases and link-resolver vendors in 2011. One patron did not contact the library, but complained on Twitter that the resource not working. Eventually, the tweet was discovered by a library employee, who then forwarded it to Ashmore. Because her library's users do not always directly communicate with her and her colleagues when resources are not working, Samford University Library developed a proactive approach to finding out when these instances occurred - they began examining ILL data. Quoting Karen Janke (2007), Ashmore affirmed the notion that ILL cancellations are "the indicator species of the library...a species whose presence, absence, or relative well-being in a given environment is indicative of the health of its ecosystem as a whole." Because there are users who do not verify if a library has an article before requesting it through ILL, cancelled ILL requests (due to the library having the item) are a great source of information to determine if users are not able to access these subscribed resources, and thus, they are an indicator species.

Interlibrary Loan staff at Samford University began including Ashmore on ILL request cancellation notifications via email. Ashmore and her assistant would then take each citation in the e-mail messages for cancelled ILL requests and test access through three access paths - the catalog, the discovery layer, and Google Scholar.

An OCLC whitepaper published in 2014 aptly described the three common problems they encountered. Susanne S. Kemperman and colleagues at OCLC (2014) identified "three core problems with the current state of data quality":

- "Data are incomplete or inaccurate;"
- "Bibliographic metadata and holdings data are not synchronized;"
- "Libraries receive data in multiple formats" (p. 2).

Ashmore provided several examples of the first problem above, which causes users to submit ILL requests for items owned:

- A source does not pass a complete date to a target and the link resolver provides a more complete but incorrect date.
- Incomplete or inaccurate source enumeration metadata.
- A source uses a different ISSN than what a target uses (e.g. one uses the print ISSN and the other uses the online ISSN for a journal).
- Supplement pagination is a frequent source of link resolution failures.

Ashmore noted that the first example of the problem of incorrect or inaccurate data was solved by contacting the vendor. However, with the second example, she had to suspend article-level linking to the target databases for a particular vendor and rely on journal-level linking. This prevented the problem of the user encountering a dead end or requesting something through ILL that users are authorized to access.

Users at Samford University are told to look for the “Full-Text at Samford” link off to the right of citations in Google Scholar, but Ashmore discovered that in many cases the link was hidden under a “More” button in Google Scholar results. This is the last small link under a citation, which users are unlikely to select. Initially, Ashmore thought this occurred only with new titles that have not been tracked by Google Scholar for long, but later found that this hidden link issue happened with resources that they have had for some time. Unfortunately, they have not been able to resolve this problem with Google Scholar.

The third core problem encountered by users at Samford University is incorrectly mapped metadata. Ashmore provided the example of a citation from a database for an article that was formerly open access. To fix this problem, she had to involve the link-resolver service provider so the copy at the other side of the link was the appropriate copy for her users. She stressed that vendors embrace consistent data formats and noted that most users are not likely to take advantage of the revise citation option to fix the incorrectly passed metadata.

Ashmore addressed workflow issues related to her project. ILL staff involving her in all correspondence regarding cancelled requests was not sustainable in the long term. The ILL staff provided her and her assistant with access to the ILLiad database so that they could run queries in order to examine cancelled requests. This process provided them with ideas about how they can improve access to electronic resources at Samford University. They identified education graduate students as users who submit numerous ILL requests and may need additional instruction and outreach to ensure that

they can better navigate the library’s discovery system. Users are also now provided with OpenURLs in the email notifications that they receive from the ILL department. As a result of the collaboration with ILL, holdings information in OCLC’s World Cat is frequently updated so that users are not making loan request for items not available for lending. They considered interface design and considered trying one-click again and thought about how to give users a better understanding of the results they see. This approach has compelled Ashmore to think about how to handle print and open access resources.

One participant asked: “Have you noticed a difference in the number or types of requests that you are getting?” Ashmore responded that they saw a huge reduction in the number of requests for articles that are freely available after they provided a Google Scholar link.

The Samford University Library provides document delivery for faculty and staff, but not for students. The philosophy at Samford University Library is that they want students be self-sufficient in their research endeavors, but Ashmore will intervene and provide a copy to a user if something is “super broken.” While this is partially a manpower issue, their policy reflects their philosophy as to why they do not provide document delivery to students.

Ashmore and her colleagues were able to identify patterns and trends with certain vendors and she stressed the importance of vendors embracing NISO recommendations. Also, she collaborated with Samford University Library’s systems librarian to see problems where mapping went wrong.

While her library switched from Serials Solutions to EBSCO’s Link Source, she stressed that these problems will continue to occur. She concurred with a participant that an OpenURL link resolver is “only as good as the metadata.”

References

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