History and Development

The InfoLinks OPAC (text-based) was opened for public use in late spring 1993 and the Web version of the OPAC was first launched in 1997. Both versions were maintained in parallel until 2001/2, when the use and functionality of the text-based catalog had fallen far behind the web-based version. While the text-based catalog continued to be offered as a text-only for those users with sight impairments, by late 2004 most adaptive technologies were aimed at the web browser experience and the telnet protocol had been deprecated due to security issues. One can still access the text-based catalog by using the SSH protocol to access library.uark.edu with login and password infolink / infolink, but the help screens and other functions are no longer updated.

The InfoLinks Web OPAC
Launched in 1997, the web catalog, like the text-based version, was maintained for many years by a collaborative committee (the “OPAC Training Committee”) together with the Head of Systems. The web catalog was initially the “home page” for the Libraries, providing a gateway to electronic databases as well as hours, news, and research help.

With each release, Ill has given us additional tools to customize our catalog and to improve the user experience. A sampling of significant enhancements added to the catalog in the last 15 years include:

- journal title index (222 field) local project completed (1994)
- “partners” links to other local library catalogs (separate purchase; now supplanted by WebBridge)
- view / renew your checkouts
- patron-initiated holds / recalls
- email / export results
- local “reference” databases (first Wilson Indexes then Arkansas Publications Index / Index Arkansas)
• featured lists / new books (first available and implemented by Law in 2000, then abandoned; implemented by the Libraries in general in 2007)
• display of 856 links to electronic resources
• MARCIVE records purchased and loaded (1997)
• Saved searches / alerts (2004)
• electronic reserves / Millennium Media Management (2005)
• SSL / secure login (2006)
• LDAP authentication (2007)
• WebPac Pro bundle: persistent links, 50 results per page, enhanced relevancy ranking, patron ratings, limit to available, My Reading History, printer-friendly pages (2007)
• spellcheck (separate purchase; 2007)
• text to cell phone (developed in-house, 2007)
• WebBridge external links (see separate module report)

Management Interface

The screens and options for the text-based OPAC are managed through the text-based administrative module; these include Set System Options > OPAC options, as well as portions of the logins and passwords area.

The Web OPAC was managed solely through the text-based administrative module until 2000. Until that time, HTML pages were edited locally then uploaded to the InfoLinks server via FTP. From 2000 forward, III added functions that allowed one to directly FTP pages in and out of the server via the FTP function built into web authoring software such as Dreamweaver. With Release 2005, III added a Millennium component to Web OPAC management that resides in the Millennium admin module. Pages and settings are currently managed with a combination of Millennium and text-based functions. It should be noted that the management interface for the reference database (Index Arkansas) is not nearly as well developed as that for the full OPAC. In addition to the “main” catalog site: http://library.uark.edu (on port 80), there is a staging server on http://library.uark.edu:2082; the main Index Arkansas port is at http://library.uark.edu:81 and the staging port at http://library.uark.edu:2084.

Web OPAC display and features are controlled by the interaction of several separate functions:

• System Options > OPAC options (maintained in the text-based admin interface)
• wwwoptions: locally maintained rules for functions and display (maintained in Millennium Admin, full list of wwwoptions at http://csdirect.iii.com/manual/rmil_alpha_wwwoption_list.html)
• webpub.def file: a rules file for the display conditions and labels for each MARC field display (maintained in Millennium Admin)
• HTML and javascript: the actual coding of the web pages associated with the catalog (Maintained with Dreamweaver; the Millennium Admin module, and the text-based admin)

Patron Use and Statistics

InfoLinks continues to be the most-used electronic resource offered by the Libraries, with more than 1.7 million searches last year. Searches have increased dramatically in recent years as researchers learned to check the catalog for the most up-to-date print and electronic journal holdings. Because the Libraries have made the decision to catalog all electronic resources in InfoLinks, it remains a vital and comprehensive gateway to all our holdings.
Only patron search statistics are collected and compiled for the annual report. These statistics must be gathered weekly as they are in a ten-day rolling file. Although search statistics are available through the both the Web Management Reports interface (http://library.uark.edu/manage) and the text-based admin module, some reports show only the activity in either the Web OPAC or text-based OPAC, depending on which interface one is using.

Other statistics that are available for “snapshot” analysis include:

- number of searches by hour of day
- indexes used and results (keyword, subject, title, etc.)
  - sub-report by index used of number of records retrieve and searches retrieving no results
- number and kind of system-suggested searches (try same search as word, reverse author name, xrefs, etc.)
- number of records retrieved (searches resulting in 1, 2-8, 9-30, etc. records, average records per search)
- number of searches limited
- number of records exported and export format
- number and kind of displays invoked (checkin card, MARC format, etc.)
- view current searches (real-time queries)

One metric that is requested by ACRL and other organizations, but that we have not been able to supply from the Innovative system, is the number of user sessions (rather than searches) in the catalog. This year, we implanted a small image in the main InfoLinks Web OPAC page to try to approximate this count. To date this fiscal year, we have logged approximately 60,000 sessions.

**Desired Enhancements / Improvements**

Innovative continues to be the top-ranked ILS system for academic libraries (currently the ILS used by used by the most ARL Libraries; chosen by twice as many migrating libraries last year than any other vendor: http://www.librarytechnology.org/). The user-community is very active and has developed many add-ons and extensions to improve the catalog. However, it seems at times as if III relies almost too heavily on the user community for new developments as many new features are often marketed as new products rather than as ongoing improvements to the current platform.
Such is the case with the newly-launched Encore product, an intermediate server that sits between the III box and the user, offering new ways to explore library holdings and databases. Encore provides many “Web 2.0” features that engage students, such as faceted search results, relevancy based on circulation and holdings data such as number of copies or number of checkouts, patron rankings and reviews, cloud tags, pass-through of searches to subscription databases, etc. (example at Michigan State University: http://www2.lib.msu.edu/). However, it is an expensive product, with limited customization options, that would require the addition of a separate server. The Libraries should explore “home-made” or lower-cost methods to achieve the same results, such as the incorporation of Library Thing tag clouds (see example at http://www2.lib.msu.edu/) before investing in such an ambitious new product.

The last redesign of the Web OPAC (summer 2007) added many functions but there is much room for improvement. The brief browse screens work well for monographs but can be very confusing for serial records. The Libraries should pursue options to improve the clarity of our ejournal holdings. The Cataloging Policies and Practices Review Committee has issued a recommendation on this issue that is currently under administrative review. The purchase of the Electronic Resources Management (ERM) product might help to improve the display of ejournals holdings in the catalog as well as to streamline processing and maintenance.

Other enhancement requests that have been repeatedly submitted are: the ability to hyperlink status codes to a full explanation of each code (similar to the way location codes are linked now) and better compliance with web standards in the basic HTML of sample pages.

In the administration and statistics areas, a key enhancement would be the ability to cumulate statistics for at least a month at a time, rather than weekly. Release 2007 has a new version of the Web Management Reports for WAM (Web Access Management) and Circulation; one hopes that search stats will be in the following release. III is already at work on better Millennium admin functions for reference databases, which would greatly speed maintenance activities on the Index Arkansas database.

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