

Session B09. VALID: Reference and Resource Sharing Update
Presentation Title Evaluating Library Discovery Layers
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Introduction

The Reference Services Committee was charged with the task of evaluating potential candidates for a shared VALE discovery layer. Joseph Deodato (Rutgers University) presented on behalf of the committee to explain the method used to develop the evaluation rubric that was used to guide this process.

Method

The committee adopted a three-step evaluation process that consisted of: 1) compiling a list of user-centered requirements, 2) ranking these requirements in order of importance, and 3) scoring each product based on how well it met the given requirements. At the time of evaluation, XC still did not have a live installation available for testing, so the rubric could only be applied to VuFind and Blacklight.

Drafting Requirements

The committee began its evaluation by discussing the desirable features and functionality of an ideal discovery interface, irrespective of their familiarity or experience with any particular product. The discussion resulted in a list of 35 requirements arranged into 6 broad categories:

- *Content* Supported content types, formats, and languages
- *Display* Interface design, layout, and navigation
- *Search* Search options, performance, and relevancy ranking
- *Results* Record display, sorting, and output options
- *Services* Account management, personalized services, and social features
- *Systems* Interoperability, customization, and support

Ranking Requirements

Requirements were prioritized in order of importance. Each member was asked to rank the requirements according to a 3-point scale: 3=mandatory, 2=desirable, 1=optional.

The highest ranking features were:

- Intuitiveness of design
- Ease of navigation
- Search performance
- Customizability

The lowest ranking features were:

- User-submitted content
- Social media integration
- RSS feeds
- Visual searching

Applying the Rubric

By compiling a prioritized list of requirements, the committee created a comprehensive rubric that could be applied fairly and consistently to all of the products under consideration. Each product was awarded the appropriate point value (3, 2, or 1) based on how well they met the requirement. Partial values were

given if the product only partially met the requirement. Zero points were awarded if the product failed to meet the requirement. Certain requirements such as account management, integration of enriched content, and context-sensitive borrowing, etc. could not be adequately evaluated since they would require additional programming and/or integration with local data or systems. In these cases, it was merely noted that the feature was possible with local customization. If one product included plug-ins or drivers to support this extension of functionality it was rated higher than if this functionality would have to be created from scratch.

Results

Overall, the committee found VuFind and Blacklight to be very similar products. Both are based on SOLR/Lucene and share many of the same features and functionality. When compared according to locally-defined requirements, however, VuFind scored approximately 10 points higher. The two key areas of differentiation were in the areas of search performance and support & development.

Compared to Blacklight, VuFind seems to have more out-of-the-box search functionality, including smart search features such as autocomplete, autocorrect, stop word filtering, etc. Although the same functionality could likely be had with Blacklight, we didn't find any live installations demonstrating this. VuFind also included more advanced search options (fielded, Boolean, wildcard, proximity, fuzzy matching, etc.) and limiters that we didn't see in Blacklight. VuFind also provided out-of-the-box support for item recommendations, whereas Blacklight relies on an experimental plugin for this feature. Finally, compared to Blacklight, VuFind appears to be a slightly more mature product supported by more extensive documentation, a larger development community, an active mailing list, regular developer meetings, and commercial support options.

Discussion

One attendee asked if either product was found to be lacking in any of the features deemed to be "required" by the committee. The presenter responded that, relative to VuFind, Blacklight was found lacking in the areas of smart search functionality and the size of its development community, both of which were mandatory requirements.