

Disaggregating the Library: Embedding Library Resources in a Management School Website

Project Background

An information-seeking client will tend to use the most convenient search method and discontinue as soon as minimally acceptable results are found¹. This *principle of least effort* theory has been found to hold true regardless of the user's proficiency as a searcher or level of subject expertise. It also takes into account the user's previous information-seeking experience. The user will choose tools that are most familiar, easiest to use, and that yield results.

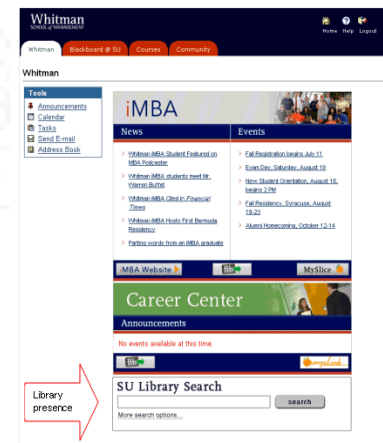
Library systems require considerable effort to understand and navigate. To conduct a comprehensive search requires the execution of numerous queries across resources, each with its own unique interface and search protocol. Users have increasingly turned away from the library web interface because of their difficulty in deciding which of the multiple entry points best suit their needs. Search tools on the open Web are more easily accessed and therefore preferable. In many cases, resulting information is not authoritative or appropriate for academic use, a concern to faculty and evident in the resources students reference for their class deliverables.

To address this issue and provide the university community with more ready access to quality information resources, the Syracuse University Library is working with SU's schools and colleges to embed library information resources within their own web environments. Rather than requiring students and faculty to navigate the library web site, library resources will be packaged within the context of other school and college web tools. As a result of this placement, we believe that students and faculty will be more likely to consult library resources for their research.

A library project team began by establishing a collaborative partnership with the Whitman School of Management. The team worked with Whitman faculty members and staff to identify the subject specific resources and services of most importance for teaching and research and to develop new methods for integrating these resources within the Whitman web environment in a coherent and useful way. Key elements of the project included assessing the specific information and research needs of Whitman faculty and students, selecting specific content for the site, identifying appropriate technologies, web design and development, marketing and promotion, and overall assessment of project outcomes.

Embedding Library Services

An ideal vision expressed by representatives from the Whitman school included seamless, one-stop access to resources, individualization based on the user needs and ease of use. Access to these elements will be located within their new intranet, which is based within Blackboard

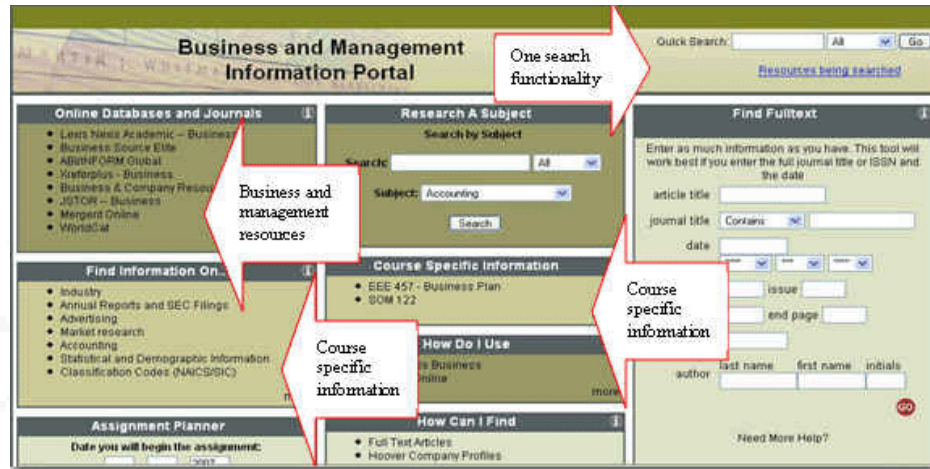


¹ Zipf, George K. (1949). *Human Behaviour and the Principle of Least Effort: An Introduction to Human Ecology*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Press.

Communities. The intranet will be used as a centralized point for information by Whitman faculty and students and will also include resources/news from other sources.

Streamlining Resources

Through requirements gathering exercises, Whitman faculty and students expressed a need for access to resources and services specific to the subject of business and management. In addition to databases and electronic journals, they needed an access point to course-specific information, writing instruction, frequently-used



<http://library.syr.edu/information/services/whitman/students.html>

resources, and some means of communicating with their library subject specialist. These resources were incorporated into audience specific gateways designed for faculty, undergraduate and graduate students, and staff. When users authenticate to Blackboard Communities, they will have access to the single library search box and a gateway site that has been customized for their specific user category, based on their credentials.

Potential benefits

To ensure a successful outcome, project participants from the Syracuse University Library and the Whitman School of Management provided expertise in a variety of areas, including business subject expertise, instructional design, and web design and technology. The anticipated overall benefits include:

- ▶ Customized access to resources tailored to Whitman's specific information needs
- ▶ Increased level of student engagement with high-quality information resources and research tools; increased use of high-priced library online resources
- ▶ Easier integration of articles and other content within the school's intranet
- ▶ Improved communication and stronger ties between Whitman and the Library
- ▶ Project will serve as a model for deployment in other schools/departments/disciplines