

## **Review of InfoM25 - Desk research on user trends**

**Gavin Beattie, February 2010.**

### **Summary**

This is based on recent reports in the areas of resource discovery and information-seeking behaviour. Reports have been chosen that are most relevant to InforM25.

There are a number of recent reports on how researchers access information. Although many of these reports have targetted younger researchers, there is evidence that older researchers display similar behaviour in the online environment. The most consistent finding is that Google is dominant as a main source of access to information. Reasons given for this are the intuitive, simple, familiar interface and that Google is a “trusted brand”. Library branded resources are less likely to be used because they are not intuitive. Information literacy is generally low, although perceived to be high.

Several reports detail information seeking behaviour, often driven by time pressures. Resources are skimmed, researchers read the first part of an article and then click through to something else spending as much or more time navigating as reading. Many agree that more data is needed on the way information is used and that collection of this activity data should be included in information systems.

Partnerships, collaborative acquisition, shared-access and sector-wide leadership are important and must be developed further (including the recommendations of the HAERVI project). Institutions also need to develop models for storing and sharing research data. Against a background of reduced funding, collaborative regional approaches may be attractive.

Internationally resource discovery services are developing and refining what they offer to engage with users. Interfaces are becoming more intuitive and user-friendly and content is being added – both user generated and from sites such as Amazon and LibraryThing. Significantly library data is being pushed onto other services such as Google Books, WorldCat and through Facebook apps.

The future information environment is likely in part to be characterised by: the further rise of electronic content, especially ebooks; large “trusted brands” (Google, Facebook etc..) in an integrated web environment; new models to manage research data; the need for more information on how users behave.

### **Further detail on the reports consulted**

#### **Information behaviour of the researcher of the future ('Google Generation' project) – JISC / BL / CIBER (2007)**

<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/infostudies/research/ciber/downloads/>

Study commissioned to identify how the specialist researchers of the future are likely to access and interact with digital resources in five to ten years time.

- There is a diverse variety of activity in the use of electronic information sources
- Behaviour summarised as –
  - Horizontal information skimming (around 60% of ejournal users read no more than the first three pages before moving on the something else)
  - Navigation – as much time spent finding their bearings as viewing what they find
  - Squirreling – lots of downloads, less evidence of actual reading
  - Diversity – location, gender, type of university and status all strong indicators to information-seeking behaviour

- Checking – authority of sources is assessed quickly and by individuals by dipping and cross-checking across different sites. Brands (eg Google) are trusted.
- Information literacy among young people has not improved
- Library branded resources are less used than search engines because they are not as intuitive
- While social networking should be monitored, there is little evidence that students want to interact with their libraries in this way
- Ebooks will be a bigger issue than social networking
- Many “getting by with Google” because of poor information skills – but do not recognise the problem.
- Predicts that by 2017 the information environment will be characterised by:
  - Unified, global web culture, integrated into daily life with powerful trusted brands
  - Rise of the e-book
  - Content explosions (eg Google Books)
  - New forms of scholarship and publication – pre-pub, blogs, wikis, repositories. New forms of collaboration and peer review.
  - Semantic web
- Concluding significance for libraries –
  - Websites need to be more visible and opened up to search engines
  - Abandon hope of being a one-stop shop
  - Accept that much content will never be used, or only as a place to bounce from

### **Researchers of tomorrow – JISC / BL / EfC (2009)**

<http://explorationforchange.net/index.php/current-projects/researchers-of-tomorrow/researchers-of-tomorrow-home.html>

3-year study looking at the information seeking behaviour of doctoral students born between 1982-1994, started in April 2009. A survey of representative sample of such students with 6500 respondents found that:

- Google and Google Scholar are dominant as the main sources of information
- Only a small proportion are using “emergent” or “Web 2.0” technology in their research
- Less likely to work from home than older scholars
- Time pressures are significant
- About half have received information skills training.
- Majority were looking for text-based and secondary published research resources, rather than primary data

### **Sense-Making and Synchronicity: Information-Seeking and Communication Behaviors of Millennials and Baby Boomers – Connaway et al. OCLC (2008)**

<http://www.oclc.org/research/publications/archive/2008/connaway-libri.pdf>

One of a number of papers from OCLC, the headline summary is that students consistently rely on Google and human contact for their information needs.

## **Overcoming barriers: access to research information content – Research Information Network (2009)**

<http://www.rin.ac.uk/barriers-access>

This report found that researchers are encountering difficulties in getting access to the content they need and that this is having a significant impact on their research. Their recommendations include:

- Collaborative acquisition
- More open-access
- Remove cataloguing backlogs in academic libraries
- Libraries should ensure comprehensive online coverage of their holdings
- More training and guidance on resource discovery and access
- More shared access between libraries and adoption and promotion of existing services
- A UK-wide library membership card for HE
- Institutions should implement the recommendations of the HAERVI project (HE Access to e-Resources in Visited Institutions).
- Continue to work to simplify arrangements for access to e-content by external researchers

## **Patterns of information use and exchange: case studies of researchers in the life sciences – Research Information Network (2009)**

<http://www.rin.ac.uk/case-studies>

This report concluded that there are currently numerous means by which researchers in the life sciences use and share information. These are often informal. There is limited understanding of what forms are most effective and researchers would welcome professional advice and guidance. There is a role for information and library services to work with researchers to develop effective models.

## **JISC TILE Project (Towards implementation of Library 2.0 and the e-framework) (2008)**

<http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/resourcediscovery/tile.aspx>

This project was set up to look at current library use of web 2.0 applications, identify challenges and propose a model for the future. Its recommendations included:

- That institutions should ensure new systems (LMS, repositories, ERM, VLE etc...) collect activity data as standard. Shared services should do the same. A common data format should be developed and supported
- That JISC services such as COPAC, Intute and SUNCAT should be part of the 'mashed up' web services environment.
- Partnership working to provide sector-wide leadership in thinking through the challenges facing libraries in the new technological environment.

## **JISC Resource Discovery Taskforce – information gathering exercise – JISC / Rightscom (2009)**

<http://rdf.jiscinvolve.org/>

Resource discovery services were analysed and described in Australia, Canada, the Netherlands and Sweden. These national services have much in common with InforM25. Common developments with these services include:

- Redesigning interfaces to make more welcoming and intuitive
- Incorporating relevance ranking, faceted search and results clustering, as well as features such as 'Did you mean...?'
- Importing book cover art, reviews and tagging from sources such as Amazon and LibraryThing
- Improving and extending metadata
- Taking library data out to users in various ways rather than expecting them to come and find it. Examples include exposing records via Google BookSearch, Google Scholar and Yahoo! either directly or via WorldCat; embedding search boxes in Facebook;
- Tying finding more tightly to getting, for example by deep linking to the catalogues of a user's local library; providing pre-paid non-mediated Inter Library Loan accounts for users; linking to bookshops' websites; experimenting with home delivery

Conclusions included:

- All of the services examined in this report understand that change is vital if library catalogues are to retain relevance and visibility in the wider networked discovery environment
- There is a need to make more concerted ongoing efforts to understand users' needs and behaviours (not only when developing new interfaces) and where appropriate, segment their user bases and market services more effectively to these different groups
- Community features need scale and the services are right to follow the path of relying on tags and reviews from e.g. LibraryThing and Amazon, though this does imply dependence on services which are outwith their control
- Scale is vital for user-generated material: both the size of the user community and the size of the metadata collection will make a considerable difference to a service's ability to attract and retain users.
- The increasing dependence of resource discovery services on a number of large external datasets is of interest. This interdependence seems to be at the data level: as yet, functionality is not shared between the resource discovery services studied here.
- More needs to be done to understand user journeys: individual sites monitor what users do, but the way they move between different sites is not known. This would help analyse how users get to resource discovery services and what they do once they have finished.

### **The Economic downturn and libraries – Charleston Conference / UCL CIBER (2009)**

<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/infostudies/research/ciber/charleston-survey.pdf>

Some context is provided by a survey of 835 institutions worldwide found that 37.4% expect to cut their spending on information resources over the next two years. Academic libraries seem likely to be worst hit with 34.3% of them expecting to receive a smaller budget in two years' time than they do currently.