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The Open WorldCat Is Out of the Bag

Whether you love it or hate it, the cat is out of the bag—the Open WorldCat, that is. Max Anderson, from SOLINET (South-eastern Library Network), came to the Washington Library Association Conference to explain how Open WorldCat works, and how it can benefit libraries and their patrons.

Open WorldCat is a public interface to WorldCat, the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) union catalog. Open WorldCat—which OCLC manages—uses familiar websites such as Google and Yahoo to allow patrons, customers, and Web searchers to find books and other materials held in libraries. Google and Yahoo are OCLC's main partners, but publishers' and booksellers' groups have also begun to make library materials searchable from their sites as well. Open WorldCat extends a library's holdings beyond the local building and online catalog, and allows patrons to find materials from nearby libraries that they might not even know exist. Open WorldCat also makes parts of the "invisible Web" more visible to users.

Here is a current list of Open WorldCat partners, from the OCLC website:

- Abebooks (abebooks.com)
- Alibris (alibris.com)
- Amazon.com (amazon.com)
- Antiquarian Booksellers' Association of America (abaa.com)
- Ask.com (ask.com)
- Biblio (biblio.com)
- BookPage (bookpage.com)
- DirectTextbook (directtextbook.com)

- Google, Google Scholar and Google Books (google.com, scholar.google.com, books.google.com)
- Greenwood Publishing Group (greenwood.com)
- HCI Bibliography (hcibib.org)
- Yahoo! Search (search.yahoo.com)

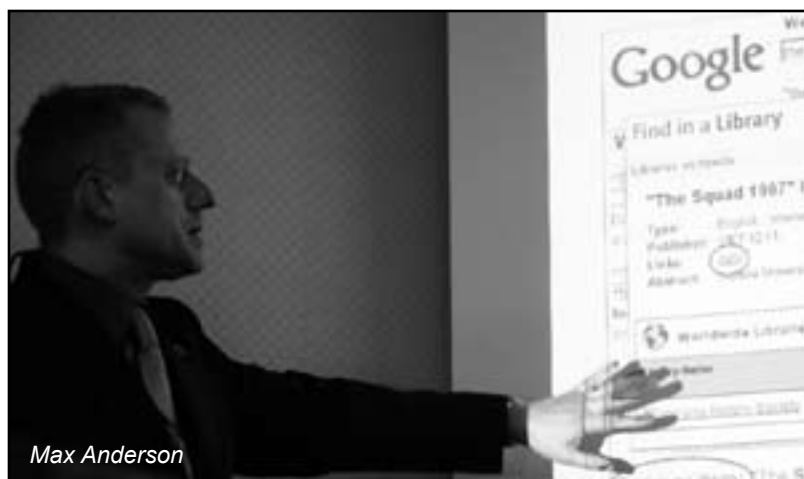
Open WorldCat is still looking for partners that might benefit users, and would appreciate recommendations from the library community.

How to Search

The patron types the title of an item, and the phrase "find in a library" into the search area of Google, Yahoo, or on one of the other partners' websites. (The result may not always be at the top of the page. Unrelated websites might inadvertently include this phrase.) From the search results, click on the title linked to www.worldcatlibraries.org. This action brings up the "find in a library" interface, with results keyed to your ZIP code or, conversely, with a box in which to enter your ZIP code. Library holdings for the item are displayed, listed by proximity to your Zip code. Libraries further from you than sixty-five miles are listed alphabetically. (One concern is that if only the library headquarters or main branch ZIP code is given for the whole system, the distance will be calculated from that ZIP code, and users may not see items at closer branch libraries.)

The holdings records will also list the format(s) of the item. For example, a book icon will appear in the listing, if such an icon is available. There are also tabs for "libraries," "details," "subjects," "editions," and "reviews." Clicking the "libraries" tab shows a list of libraries that hold the requested book. Clicking on the book (or other medium) icon just below the work's title links you to the holding library's catalog, which gives more information about the item, such as call number, availability, etc.

The "details" tab gives more information about the item and allows registered users to add table-of-contents and note information. Registering requires creating an Open WorldCat login and password. One need not be affiliated with a library to register. (If you already have a WebJunction login and password, they will work.) The "subjects" tab displays Library of Con-



Mary Wise is a catalog librarian at Central Washington University Library. Photo by Cameron Johnson.

gress Subject Headings (LCSH). The “editions” tab displays various editions, along with buttons to “buy it now,” if a patron would rather buy than borrow. This button is controversial with many library workers, who would rather promote library usage than sales.

The “reviews” tab allows registered users to read or write an online review. Users add information to entries using wiki software. Wiki means “quick” in the Hawaiian language. Wikis allow users to quickly add or edit information online, without cumbersome Web authoring tools. Allowing the general public to add information to records is familiar to users of such sites as the Internet Movie Database, Amazon, Netflix, and Wikipedia. Unlike those sites, however, the Open WorldCat wiki will not allow others to change what someone has already submitted. OCLC may also edit or delete posts deemed unsuitable.

OCLC has a link to how Open WorldCat works: www.oclc.org/worldcat/open/how/default.htm

Library Requirements

Here are the requirements for a library to make its holdings records available in Open WorldCat:

- The library needs to be a member of the OCLC cooperative.
- The library must have contributed its holdings to WorldCat through OCLC.
- The library must subscribe to the FirstSearch reference service and make the WorldCat database available to its patrons.
- The library must enable “deep linking” with OCLC. (If deep linking is not enabled, the user will be taken only to the library catalog’s main search page.)

Linking is done in Open WorldCat using Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records (FRBR). FRBR is a model developed by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) in 1998. FRBR restructures catalog displays to consolidate bibliographic records for one conceptual entity. For instance, in many catalogs the user finds several records for one intellectual work, such as *Gone With the Wind*. The user sees records for several different print editions, one or more for the film, one or more for the soundtrack recording, etc. FRBR gives a

scoping effect to the arrangement of bibliographic records. FRBR’s terms (from the OCLC website) are:

- **The work**, a distinct intellectual or artistic creation (e.g., *Gone With the Wind*)
- **The expression**, the intellectual or artistic realization of a work (i.e. the format: book, film, translations)
- **The manifestation**, the physical embodiment of an expression of a work (the edition)
- **The item**, a single exemplar of a manifestation (the individual copy)

More detailed information about FRBR can be found here: www.oclc.org/research/projects/frbr/default.htm

A Critical Response

Open WorldCat faces criticism within the library community. Many users and library staff believe that its emphasis is too commercial, and that users are encouraged to buy material rather than find it in libraries. Some question where proceeds will go from clicking on certain buttons. Some patrons assume “buy it now” means they can purchase the item from a library. Google people have said they created the “find this book in a library” link in reaction to library employees unhappy that so many things are being scanned onto the Internet, and that Google is only trying to make the text of items easy for customers to find.

These criticisms aside, I believe Open WorldCat is a useful tool if people know it is there and how to use it. Using it may validate the library to patrons who think that if they can’t find something on Google, it doesn’t exist. It remains to be seen whether Open WorldCat will encourage more library usage—but it certainly does provide a higher profile for library holdings.

Anyone wishing further information, can email Max Anderson at manderson@solinet.net

