3-2011

Enhance and "mobilize" the library catalog with cloud services

JoLinda Thompson
George Washington University

Recommended Citation

Technology: Enhance and "Mobilize" the Library Catalog with Cloud Services

Submitted by JoLinda L. Thompson, AHIP, Himmelfarb Health Sciences Library, The George Washington University Medical Center, Washington, DC; edited by Lynne M. Fox, AHIP

The online public access catalogs (OPACs) still used by many libraries often fall short of the expectations of today's users with their dull, text-based interfaces. The dual movements toward cloud computing and mobile devices are bringing new services and products to the market that make it possible to enhance and mobilize traditional OPACs, making them more appealing and accessible to library users. Jacket images, reviews, comments, user tags, and mobile applications (apps) can now be introduced to most OPACs without a major investment in time or expense.

Syndetic Solutions, now a division of Bowker, and Baker & Taylor's Content Café offer jacket images, tables of contents, book reviews, and other enhanced content for web-based OPACs. Most of the major integrated library system (ILS) vendors have an agreement with one or both of these services and can easily configure an OPAC to include whatever data elements a library would like to provide with the item record. Both Syndetic Solutions and Content Café are purchased as subscriptions and act as cloud services with data delivered from remote servers.

There are alternatives with no cost for the very budget conscious. Google Book Search application programming interfaces (APIs) can be used to bring in jacket covers and the enhanced content available on the Google Book page. Open Library has an API that provides book jackets and author photos. Both of these services are free, but the content base is smaller than those of Syndetic Solutions or Content Café, and assistance from a web developer may be required. Amazon Associates Web Services can be used to import cover images and the other data elements available in a typical Amazon product record, and many libraries do pull content in this way. However, Amazon does not officially sanction this use of its data if a library does not activate the Amazon Buy It links [1].

LibraryThing, a social networking site for book lovers, offers a host of enhanced content products for libraries through its LibraryThing for Libraries service. In addition to many of the elements mentioned above, LibraryThing can bring Web 2.0 functionality to a catalog in the form of user reviews, tags, recommendations, and Facebook apps. Individual LibraryThing members tag and review items in their personal libraries, creating the data that the service brings to the catalog, along with access to chats and groups on various topics. As stated in a recent review, "This system runs beautifully for popular works, but can be problematic for works that have a much smaller pool of experts to contribute" [2]. Cambridge Information Group, which owns Bowker/Syndetic Solutions, recently acquired a minority stake in LibraryThing and is now the exclusive distributor of its library products.

Many ILS vendors pushed mobile apps for their catalog products to the market last year. These run the gamut from SirsiDynix's BookMyne, which is only for iPhones, to Polaris's Mobile PAC Service, which can be accessed through any smart phone's browser. WorldCat has this type of universal access for smart phones: It provides a search interface for WorldCat's bibliographic database, allowing users to locate local libraries that have the searched-for item. Users with iPhones can download the app RedLaser, which turns the iPhone into a barcode scanner that will pull up matches from Google, theFind, and local libraries on WorldCat.

LibraryThing recently released its mobile service, LibraryAnywhere. Like most of the vendor-specific products, it searches a catalog and gives users access to services like viewing their checked-out items and renewing them.

Cloud Services for the Library Catalog

Amazon Associates Web Services: affiliate-program.amazon.com

Boopsie: www.boopsie2.com

Content Café: www.baker-taylor.com/pdfs/content_cafe.pdf

Google Book Search APIs: www.code.google.com/apis/books/

LibraryAnywhere: www.libraryanywhere.com

LibraryThing for Libraries: www.librarything.com/forlibraries/

Open Library: www.openlibrary.org/developers/

Syndetic Solutions: www.syndetics.com

WorldCat Mobile: www.worldcat.org/m/

It can be used as a web service from any smart phone, or users can download apps specifically for iPhone, Blackberry, and Droid that have more features. Subscribing libraries can post book lists, announcements, and links to services like "Ask a Librarian," blogs, or Facebook pages.

Boopsie, a company that produces mobile apps for a variety of industries, is marketing customized mobile apps for any library, regardless of the ILS that it uses, and has developed services for a number of large public and academic libraries. It allows searching of catalog records, hold placements, renewals, and presentation of other data such as library hours, news and announcements, and social networking tools.

Recent commercials tout "to the cloud" as a synonym for "to the rescue." Librarians can now go to the cloud to rescue traditional OPACs from the "ho-hums."

References

1. Rochkind J. Think you can use Amazon api for library service book covers? [Internet]. Bibliographic Wilderness Blog. 19 Mar 2008 [cited 4 Feb 2011]. <http://www.bibwild.wordpress.com/2008/03/19/think-you-can-use-amazon-api-for-library-service-book-covers/>.

2. DeFino M. Librarything www.librarything.com. Tech Serv Q. 2010;27(4):392–3.

Editor's Note: For an overview of the cloud computing concept, see page 21 of the June/July 2009 MLA News.