FROM SEARCH TO DISCOVERY: A NEW APPROACH TO INFORMATION RETRIEVAL AT UTS

LIBRARY

At UTS Library, the decision to install an automated retrieval system which will store, manage and provide access to almost 75% of the print collection has been the catalyst for rethinking a broad range of collection management and access issues.

Historically academic libraries in Australia have relied on open access collection models, where the main points of access to the collection are the online library catalogue and physical browsing of the shelves, aided by classification systems such as Dewey Decimal. It is our contention in this paper, that this traditional model does not serve the needs of the modern academic library and its users. For the library it is resource intensive, with financial, staffing and environmental costs which are no longer sustainable. For library users it requires an understanding of library-specific systems and schemas to navigate to the desired information, an impost on them which does not meet user expectations given the range of sophisticated interfaces now available.

Given the opportunity to re-imagine how our clients locate, browse, select and access information, UTS Library has embarked on a two-year project to develop solutions which will meet the information needs of our clients now and into the future. In particular we are interested in developing a definition of discovery which differentiates it from search. Current library search systems are efficient at locating known items, but become progressively less useful as the user's information needs become less defined. We have previously referred to this as the spectrum from search – a targeted linear activity – to discovery – an open-ended and exploratory process characterised by browsing, scanning and curiosity.

A major focus of our project, and of this paper, is an exploration of how we can develop interfaces and experiences which will serve this spectrum of information needs and behaviours. It is clear our current search methods and tools are efficacious in only some user scenarios, they do not cater to the diverse needs of our clients who approach our collections in different ways and for different purposes. To this end we will discuss some of the following themes and illustrate some of the steps taken to date to develop future discovery services: the role of playfulness and serendipity in discovery and how discovery tools might introduce elements of these to enhance browsing and information retrieval, social curation and the potential for leveraging social data and collaborative information to facilitate information retrieval and knowledge sharing, content aggregation

and the lessons we might draw from social media, visualisation and virtuality and in particular how these may serve to replace – and perhaps even improve upon – the experience of physically browsing.

While broadening our conception of search and discovery to encompass a spectrum of user behaviours and search systems, we also want to expand the definition to include both online and physical services. In libraries there has been a tendency to consider search as a systems problem, to be resolved with new and improved online search systems, the fairly new advent of 'web scale discovery' services being the most recent example. Our plans for future discovery services place equal value on human-centred services; including such 'traditional' library services as reference services, research consultations, and collection curation and exhibition. We believe these services are equally important in encouraging and aiding the exploration, browsing and discovery of information resources. Together with developing technologies, these services provide new means of revealing our collections and can allow us to deepen our reach within our community.

Throughout our paper we will also provide comment on our methodological approach and report on research currently underway which is informing our development of future discovery services. This methodology has drawn heavily on human-centred design principles and has involved ethnographic and other UX research to enhance our understanding of our client needs in delivering discovery services. As far as possible eschewing traditional project management methodologies, we have instead focussed on co-design, innovation and an emphasis on creativity and play in our approach. As an example of this we will provide a brief review of our inaugural Artist-in-Residence program and how this has contributed to new thinking about the nature of discovery and the approaches we are taking to developing discovery services.