

Improving resource discovery for users

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When thinking of research and academia, there are few more crucial tasks than resource discovery. We know from our work with institutions around the globe that it is paramount for students and organisations everywhere. Success is built on collaboration and access to the research of those who have gone before us.

Information for all

The success of finding accurate information can vary between online platforms, and regularly entails a degree of assumption, **Google** searching, publication searching and long-form subject searching. This method often leads to unsatisfactory results, restrictions, paywalls and logins that form barriers to accessing materials.

Frustrations can lead researchers to abandon their search when confronted with requests for log in information they don't have or can't find, or are returned unhelpful listings.

[Research from Elsevier and Sense about Science](#) reveals that researchers will spend more than four hours searching for research articles a week and more than five hours reading them. Of the five or six articles they read per week, only half are considered useful. This equates to researchers only finding value in a quarter of the content they find.

These frustrations are a key reason why single sign-on access, which also includes Where Are You From (WAYF) discovery, can simplify the resource discovery process. Accessing resources is much simpler through a platform which uses one log in and password for multiple subscriptions and titles. It becomes even more satisfactory if it scours multiple sites including those offering free or open-source journals and articles, and also democratises information for all.

Discovery made easy

Chatham House was one institution [struggling with discovery of resources](#). As an independent policy institute offering resources across defense and security, health, human rights, politics, technology and world trade, it found its diverse range of resources was increasing. Consequently the digital resources librarian suspected that content was being lost within its catalog and becoming under-utilised.

Chatham House was able to simplify the discovery process through the use of a customised interface which mirrors user approach and implementation of single sign-on technology. Resources that had previously been underused are now discoverable and actively promoted to users via more descriptive resource cards and personalised, suggested content lists. The library team was also able to add more resources, enhancing the user offering.

Remote access and control

The pandemic has thrown off-site access and mobile device use into sharp focus. Many are learning, working and researching remotely and while on the move. With this shift comes a requirement for user experience across devices and locations to remain consistent. The experience should be seamless in terms of discoverability and the research journey. Often researchers start the research on one device and will continue across multiple platforms. Due to this, functionality which enables mobility of research between devices, with a customisable interface that looks and behaves almost identically, is key.

Coventry University's Lanchester Library team decided to move [from their current provider](#) prior to the Covid 19 pandemic and required a solution that would remove the need for its remote desktop support to e-support. The solution had been implemented, along with IP-access switch-off, to accommodate non-[SAML](#)-compliant providers and those that were unable to provide [WAYFless linking](#).

Over 35,000 students worldwide relied on its e-first approach to information delivery. By switching to a single sign-on system, the library could provide them with seamless access to the range of resources via just one log in. The university also placed its teaching and learning platform behind the same log in as the library discovery layer, meaning students would only need to log in once per session.

This became increasingly important shortly after the switchover as the pandemic arrived. Thankfully, there was no scramble to transition all resources online as they were already in place. The advantages for students working remotely also spanned into more intuitive interface and personalisation. A platform which offered personalised widgets, messages and buttons also sped up the researcher's journey to information by highlighting sources they may not have thought of investigating.

Appearance is vital

Students want simplicity and ease of use when doing their research. But many information platforms have focused their energy on advanced features that require significant learning and practice to use. End users with access to online resources therefore struggle to understand the system. They often end up looking for the content on Google or pirate sites instead. Systems that mirror students' behaviours, offering widgets and buttons that provide personalised recommendations and messages, will give them assurance their subject is covered. It will

demonstrate that they have all the relevant resources and personalised searches within just a few clicks.

A universe of information

Reliable, seamless access to resources is key to any research. Yet we know that not all content is created equal. As an important link in the delivery chain, we know that considerations such as open access can be crucial.

Around the globe availability of resources – and specifically mode of access – can vary significantly. Paywalls and the routes to information are often problematic when considering equality. Worldwide, institutions and students with the means to purchase certain resources have the upper hand in research stakes.

There is a vast amount of free resource available online, from [EBSCO Discovery](#) to [TDNet Discovery](#), [Google Scholar](#) to [CORE Discovery](#) (Open Access). However, accessing these can be time consuming and precarious. Peer-reviewed research papers, theses, dissertations, books and their chapters can all be accessed free of charge online. Thanks to the wonders of modern technology, text and data mining can bring these open sources of information together and provide a searchable, accessible way for users to mine them.

As an increasing number of institutions embrace discovery through platforms, they are able to integrate their own data; adding to the work and achievements on offer. What is clear, when looking at resource discovery, is that experience is everything. From the first encounter with software, to the level of personalisation offered and intuitive resource search returns. Today, more than ever, with such a wealth of subscription and free-to-access information on offer; the experience must be seamless, non-obstructive to research, and above all, simple.

These views are the authors' own and do not necessarily reflect the views of UKSG.



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