Facing the changes: User education programmes as a work-in-progress

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INTRODUCTION

One of the persistent challenges in online library services is identifying our users and making sure they have access to both services and resources available.

Last 2006, SFX and MetaLib were selected for implementation across the University of Padova Libraries System. The customization and implementation of these Ex Libris products (included Aleph that was chosen for libraries automation) required the huge involvement of librarians and staff from technical services, collection development, library technology, and public services.

So, a specific working group (Glweb/Metalib) was created within the University of Padova Library System mainly for the following activities: resources selection and implementation, help and support, promotion and training. The librarians joining the working group represent all the disciplinary areas.

The Glweb/Metalib Group web page store materials and tools (ppt presentations,tutorials, updates, statistics) that all the University of Padova librarians can freely access and adapt for programming their training session.

DESCRIPTION

MetaLib provides a standardized user interface and front end to a wide variety of information resources. *Portale AIRE* is the public name of the Padova implementation of MetaLib.

Portale AIRE is operating from September 2006. Like a library, it is a work in progress. It is not a project, it is never "finished". Contents will be continually added as well as new functions. The current technical and content limitations should not blind us to its potential as our means of organizing information for our users in a rational, easily accessible and cost-efficient manner.

On June 2007, the resources included in the *Portale AIRE* are: 277 databases, 44 newspapers and journals, 97 e-books and dictionaries, 32 library catalogues, 15 multimedia, 10 search engines, 12 e-prints and thesis and 32 subject gateways.

In particular, two important additional tools were added to *Portale AIRE*, besides the contextual help function: the online italian tutorial and the link to AIRE Helpdesk. They have been designed in order to help users, both basic and advanced.

The service was initially available to on-campus users only. Now after proxy server configuration has been completed, it is available with expanded service to off-campus users too.

TRAINING

The near term challenge is of course to promote it and to educate our patrons into using it. While SFX is much appreciated, Faculties still relies on their personal link collections for accessing electronic

information sources. It is equally hard to wean students away from Google.

Academic and University Library System government organs saw a preview presentation of the new *Portale AIRE.* They supported enthusiastically the initiative hoping in its diffusion and use among academic, students and staff.

Portale AIRE promotion was spread throughout our University across all the existing media (email, faculty and libraries web pages, blogs, leaflets, posters, etc.) and different training programs were designed for:

a) Libraries staff
Training was offered in-house to all the libraries staff as the *Portale AIRE* replaced access points to e-resources. The Glweb/Metalib Group was charged to help colleagues for these activities.

b) Academic
Training sessions were tailored to disciplinary research resources accessible via *Portale AIRE.* The Glweb/Metalib Group is organizing in collaboration with Faculty library staff a calendar of workshops specially targeted to researchers and PhD students.

c) Students
A variety of different initiatives are in programme for students alphabetization to *Portale AIRE* resources:

1) University Open Days. The events are an opportunity for prospective students to gain an insight into what it would be like to study at the University of Padova and to collect information not only about the range of study options available but also about facilities and services such as libraries and their resources.

2) Presentations to new students. New enrolled students are invited to attend more detailed events focused on different important aspects: teaching and assessment, computer services and library services of course.

3) Library induction sessions. The Glweb/Metalib group collaborates with library colleagues helping them in identifying approaches to running successful training events, from basic to advanced.

4) Courses. Librarians and teachers explored a range of strategies to ensure that their learning events include a variety of interesting activities focused on disciplinary courses.

USAGE STATISTICS

Since *Portale AIRE* launch, the Glweb/Metalib Group is monitoring usage statistics provided by MetaLib. The analysis is available from the working group web page and can be extremely useful for strategic planning purposes.

Amount graphs, particularly interesting is the monthly trend of disciplinary Quickset use (from October 2006). In Quickset, the resources available to users are databases purchased by our University. At a first glance, the analysis of data suggests mainly that the increasing trend use is particular evident in the area where librarians paid attention to basic training. This training activity started at the same time with the *Portale AIRE* launch.

CONCLUSIONS

Many library and information workers are involved in training their end-users to use a variety of technology-based tools. It is important for librarians to gain an understanding of the principles of designing successful training events for the new library resources.

Successful end-user training leads to an increase in the effective use of information within an organisation. It also means that end-users become more self-reliant and improve their information skills

For the future activities, we think that user's feedback and portal statistics will be very useful for suggestions in how to best structure education sessions for academic staff and library users. In particular, users' feedback is interesting for mapping the emerging new information needs and the best way for libraries to fit them.

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