

CASE STUDY



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Enabling unified access to e-resources at Vienna University Library, Austria

Founded in 1365, Vienna University Library is one of the oldest university libraries in Europe and is the largest library in Austria, with an inventory of over 6.5 million books and 24,500 e-resources.

Challenges

The Vienna University Library licenses more than 1000 e-resource databases, which have been made available to library users via various interfaces of different types.

Frustrated with navigating these different interfaces, library staff and users became aware of the fact that they required a solution for federated searching of and access to all library e-resources from a single entry point.

Solution

MetaLib® has provided students, researchers, and staff with a single point of access to a considerable number of the e-resources held by the Vienna University Library.

The University of Vienna is the oldest university in the German-speaking world and one of the largest in Central Europe. At present, about 72,000 students are enrolled at the University of Vienna, which is also the largest teaching and research institution in Austria. Approximately 75 percent of university employees are scientists and academics.

Since 1999 the university's 45 specialist libraries, together with the main university library, have managed their print collections using the Aleph® integrated library system (ILS) from Ex Libris™. At the same time, students and researchers were accessing the institution's more than 1000 e-resource databases via a complex arrangement of electronic platforms, physical CD ROMs, local servers, and departmental Web sites. In addition to having numerous entry points for the electronic resources of the library, access to these resources also often required user ID and password authentication.

As the number of electronic resources continued to increase, library staff found it ever more complicated to catalog these resources. Users, frustrated by having to access and search multiple databases with different user interfaces and log in methods, were often deterred from using these resources altogether. It had become very clear that the university needed a more efficient and effective system for its users to perform fast and interdisciplinary searches across various resources from different providers.

In Quest of Metasearch

The university began its quest for a metasearch solution by identifying a number of requirements, such as establishing a single point of entry to the university's many e-resources and categorizing the databases relevant to each discipline so that users could establish the best place from which to begin their search. "The library began comparing available metasearch solutions and found that MetaLib best met all of our requirements," explained Christian Authried, systems librarian at the Vienna University Library.

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Results

MetaLib enables users to quickly and easily find the resource they need, whether from an e-journal or a database. Library usage statistics illustrate that e-resources available through MetaLib are accessed 50 to 110 percent more frequently than in the year prior to the introduction of MetaLib.



Using a phased approach, the library initially offered a small selection of its e-resources via MetaLib and then increased the number of these resources over time. Today, through MetaLib, library users access almost 400 of the institution's databases and e-resources, previously accessible only through different interfaces, via a single entry point. When entering MetaLib, the user is presented with ten collection categories, each containing the most relevant resources for a certain field. MetaLib also provides lists of databases structured by subject areas, which enable users to create personalized, tailor made search sets. "Before we used MetaLib it was almost impossible for students and researchers to know where to start looking for the resources they needed. Now they can identify the closest point of access with ease and focus their search in the right place."

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Getting Into MetaLib

MetaLib was installed to be used in conjunction with the SFX® OpenURL link resolver from Ex Libris, which has been live at the university library since 2004. The implementation of MetaLib started at the end of 2006 and the system went live in early 2007. "We have found the Ex Libris MetaLib and SFX support staff to be extremely responsive and collaborative," observes Authried. In order to make the library's resources searchable by MetaLib, staff eagerly began to make use of and further improve the necessary gateways, adding authentication data and applying category information to the resource when appropriate. Although these tasks increased the initial workload, library staff was aware that in the long run the time dedicated to these same e-resources would be greatly reduced.

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Currently, more than one third of the library's databases can be reached using MetaLib, and library statistics show rapidly increasing use of those databases. This number is expected to grow as the system develops. "A great advantage is that when users work with MetaLib, it makes no difference whether the resource they need is from an online journal or a web database," remarks Authried. "Thanks to the MetaLib metasearch interface, users can locate the huge range of available resources regardless of their origin, access them in the most efficient way possible, and benefit from additional features such as the uniform display of data records, saving useful searches, and exporting search results into literature management tools."

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The MetaLib deep linking capability has proven immensely helpful to Vienna University Library. Many Vienna University sub-libraries are implementing this valuable feature which enables staff to ensure that the most appropriate databases for any particular subject are presented to the researcher. .

“Vienna University Library is about to upgrade to MetaLib version 4,” comments Authried. “Our first impression of this product version has been positive. Features such as alerts, clustering, increased customization, and enabling users to choose whether to display results by relevance or chronological order will make the system even more effective for library staff and patrons.”



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