



STUDENTS

9,636

LOCATION

Cleveland, Ohio
United States of America

CHALLENGES

- **Compete with the open Web search experience**
 - Allow support staff and student assistants to handle front-line reference questions
- **Achieve seamless integration among library services**

FEATURED SERVICE

The Summon® Service

BENEFITS

- **Quick searches across multiple resources to support interdisciplinary research**
- **More efficient use of staffing resources**
- **Tighter relationships between librarians and academic Departments**

“Especially for undergrads who just needed a few scholarly articles for writing term papers, a Google-like experience was a major issue.”

– EARNESTINE ADEYEMON
Acquisitions & Metadata Services
Librarian

CASE STUDY: Web-scale Discovery Leads to New Efficiencies

Competing with the user experience of open Web searching is a common theme for libraries, and it was the major goal for the Kelvin Smith Library at Case Western Reserve University. But in implementing the Summon web-scale discovery service, they uncovered something else. They found a way to free up the librarians’ time to play a more active role in the academic life of the university.

“Using Summon, the main desk started answering first-level reference questions,” explains Brian Gray, Research Services Team Leader. “Summon allows us to take the librarians off the desk, to free up time to answer specialized research questions and to be more directly involved in their assigned academic departments outside the library.”

A ‘Google-Like Experience’

The change in library workflow began with the need to compete with open Web searching. Earnestine Adeyemon, Electronic Resource Librarian, was a member of a team that researched various discovery service options. “Our librarians were interested in providing a Google-like experience. Especially for undergrads who just needed a few scholarly articles for writing term papers, a Google-like experience was a major issue. It was also hoped that a discovery layer would eliminate a lot of the database hopping that was taking place,” Adeyemon explained.

The team did their due diligence. “We got as much information as we could on what was available and how the various web-scale discovery services function,” she recalls. “We read articles, did product reviews, talked to librarians at other institutions. I also attended a conference where the Summon presentation was impressive.”

The integration among ProQuest services cinched the decision, recounts Adeyemon: “We already had 360 Resource Manager for managing databases and e-journals. Getting a link resolver was also part of the project. That everything came from ProQuest was a major consideration. The goal was to have everything work as seamlessly as possible.”

Fast-Track Implementation

The library implemented the Summon service and 360 Link on a fast-track rollout. According to Brian Gray, Research Services Team Leader, “With the life cycle of students, you only have a couple years before you’ve lost them. So we decided that the fast approach is better. We made the decision during late fall and had it turned on by the first day of spring classes.”

And the reaction? “The students that we’ve spoken to were shocked at first. They were expecting just books,” declares Gray. “Among the students who have used Summon a lot (and they’ve told us they use it a lot) they are very happy with it. It’s helped them especially when they get into interdisciplinary areas. They knew one or two databases for their subject really well, but they didn’t know where else to look outside those databases. Now they’re bringing some of that into their research. They hadn’t done that previously.”



Freeing Librarians For Higher-Value Work

“We’re not fully staffed by librarians,” explains Gray, “and the student workers have said that Summon has made it a lot easier. That’s because they often do desk shifts by themselves. We have over 200 databases, and that can be intimidating even to a librarian. The student staff uses Summon as their primary search tool when they’re helping patrons, and especially since Summon links to the full text, it’s simplified what they have to do. Rather than try every database until they find an answer, they are able to focus on listening to the patron and finding out what they need.”

“We’ve been able to answer reference questions over email or phone; questions that we would have had to bring patrons in for previously. We show them how to search several databases and bring all the results together. That’s enough to get them started. The main desk staff always leaves the patron with contact information for the librarian (the expert) if they need it.”

From Behind the Desk, Into the Community

The selection of the Summon service was central to a broader initiative — to link librarians more closely with academic departments. The opportunity was there, as Gray explains: “We found that our librarians had been doing about 50 percent of their hours on the reference desk, and only 50 percent of the questions they were answering were what we considered hard questions.”

With the circulation desk able to handle reference questions using the Summon service, “Librarians are more available to go to departmental meetings and seminars, to hold office hours in their departments, and to be where the faculty and students are, which isn’t always in the library.”

“It’s worked well. We know that with Google, and all the networking the faculty do, they can find an article from a colleague at another university if they need it. So we’re focusing on what makes us unique. Those are the local holdings, the relationships, spending a little bit of time that clears up hours of the faculty’s time. In the future, we hope that instead of coming to us just for a piece of information, there will be partnerships and collaborations developing out of this. The more we can be embedded in and support what the faculty is doing, the more essential our library will be.”



The screenshot shows the Kelvin Smith Library website for Case Western Reserve University. It features a search bar at the top right with the text "Summon: Search across the library's collections...". A navigation menu on the left includes links for HOME, COLLECTIONS, SERVICES, FACILITIES, GIVE TO THE LIBRARY, and ABOUT US. The main content area has a "Focus on KSL" section with a map of the United States and the text "KSL makes it easy to STAY CONNECTED". Below this is a "KSL News" section with several articles and dates.

Case Western Reserve University’s experience-based approach to education and inquiry combines arts and humanities with science and technology, yielding one of the nation’s best universities for cutting-edge research and top-ranked academic programs. The Kelvin Smith Library is the knowledge and creativity commons of Case Western Reserve University. The CWRU libraries: build and maintain strong scholarly information resources; foster faculty and student engagement and productivity in their intellectual pursuits; provide high quality services for faculty, students and staff; work collaboratively with on-campus and external partners to maximize the availability of information; and grow a vibrant commitment to inclusion and diversity in programs, services, and staffing.

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