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Search Tools - Expert Evaluations

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Project Cover Sheet

Search Tools

Expert Evaluations

Project

Search Tools provides end-users with a quick, easy, and personalized interface which can metasearch (search simultaneously) for information in a variety of information resources, such as catalogs, reference resources, digital repositories, or subject-based Web gateways. Search Tools provides the ability to save references in My Shelf, to disk, send via email, or use "Find It!" to find out UM availability.

Committee & Members

Usability Working Group

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Report Info

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Objectives

Goals were to collect usability and functionality data from experts prior to conducting non-expert usability testing.

Methodology

Method – Heuristic Evaluation

8 participants

Dates of study: June 2005

Results & Analysis

Most of the concerns expressed by the expert users involve issues of labeling (e.g., E-resources) and navigation (e.g., gray on gray buttons).

Recommendations

No specific recommendations. The results gave us ideas for questions for the non-expert tests.

Search Tools Expert/Heuristic Evaluation Summary

The Usability Working Group devised an expert/heuristic evaluation to be completed by a group of expert users in order to collect usability and functionality data prior to conducting non-expert usability testing. The evaluation consisted of the completion of an unsupervised Search Tools session in which the expert answered a series of written questions.

A total of eight participants responded from a variety of different libraries across campus including Shapiro Undergraduate, Shapiro Science, Hatcher Grad, and Taubman Medical. Seven of the eight evaluators are professional librarians and one evaluator is a graduate student at the UM School of Information.

The responses of the expert users agree with those of the participants in the non-expert usability testing on several points.

- "E-resources" is "jargony" and should be changed to more descriptive terminology.
- The SFX icon needs to change, either to the standard SFX icon or to an even more obvious label such as "full text here".
- The use of gray on gray in various pages makes it more difficult to identify active links and challenging to identify different functions (the "help" link, most specifically).
- Getting back to the list of results from within a record is not intuitive at all.

Generally speaking, most of the concerns expressed by the expert users involve issues of labeling. The following is a list of the questions asked and a summary of the responses to each. The raw data is available upon request.

Expert Evaluation / Heuristic Evaluation of Search Tools

Quick Search

1. Assuming the Quick Search page will be the start page, is it clear what I'm searching?

   3 yes's
   5 no's
   - *Major concern: "general" is very vague as a description.*
   - *Change page setup so that you can roll over each category to see the list of databases within rather than having to click.*
   - *Change visible wording to "selected (category) resources including".*

2. Is it clear what the difference between "e-Resources" and "e-Journals" is?

   1 yes
   1 maybe – it's consistent with current usage
   5 no's
   - *The term "e-resources" is jargon-y. Multiple suggestions that we use "databases" instead, or that a description of what eresources are should be put right up front. (We know that there are more than just databases there, but does the patron care/know about the distinction?)*

3. Is terminology consistently used across all three search areas (Quick Search, Find e-Resources, and Find e-Journals)?

   4 yes's
   4 no's
   - *No categories/subsets for ejournals, text for basket icon says basket but there's no basket text to click: maybe rename "My SearchTools" to "Basket/Tools".*
   - *On quick search results list there is a category heading "database" but drop down ranking says "eresource.".*
   - *"Resources," "databases," and "Eresources" are used interchangeably – may create transition barrier for inexperienced users from NetER system to SearchTools.*

4. Are the results easy to understand?

   Overall yes
   - *Unclear why there is a screen switch from the searching screen (list of eresources and hits) to a list of titles. Would be helpful to be able to go back to results list. Also not clear what dictates the order of the titles displayed. Not clear what clicking "Record description" does. Couldn't*

figure out how to save a search because when gave a set of results a folder name and then went to the folders, the name didn't show up.
- *Wish for field that tells whether an item is book or article. SFX graphic is different, plus would be helpful to have description of what SFX does. Not clear how to use shopping cart of to create marked list. All the links to the database interfaces seem overkill.*

5. Is the "next/previous" text consistently used?

Overall yes
- *One strange thing was that the next button took one expert from the list of results to an individual record instead of the next page in the list of results.*
- *Two comments that color contrast was too faint / not very visible.*

6. Are the items returned the "best" matches for my search terms? How can I tell?

Ambiguous
- *Most users see ranking bar but don't trust it or feel that it really explains anything. One user got an entry that said "no rank assigned" with explanation, which was confusing.*
- *Sometimes the "loading databases" hits numbers differ from the results list numbers. Also the results don't often seem to match the search terms used.*

7. Do I know how many total results were found?

Yes, very clear except when no items are found.

8. How can I tell what is being searched before selecting a Quick Search category? Is it clear that I can click the category names to see a list of databases?

2 yes's
Several yes's but…
- *It's clear that names can be clicked but not what will happen until you do so. One user kept clicking the link expecting it to launch a search in that category and was annoyed when a window popped up.*
- *It is not clear that not all of the category names will be searched (Lexis/Nexis should be removed from Quick Search if it's not cross searchable).*

9. Is it easily understood that I can only search in one category at a time?

6 yes's (especially after you click a new radio button and the first one becomes unselected)
1 no without explanation

10. Is it obvious what the differences are between Advanced and Basic Quick Search?

Overall yes.
- *Becomes clear once you get to the Advanced search page.*
- *Many users won't bother with Advanced.*
- *It would be helpful to have an explanation/description of what advanced does (Boolean, field restriction, etc.).*
- *Label for Quick Search text space should say "word or phrase" since it does a phase search.*

11. How do I move forward and backward once I've performed a search?

Most understood they should use the next/previous buttons.
- *Can use "next" and "previous" buttons, but had trouble with that (see question 5 above).*
- *The previous/next options seem to be unavailable since they are gray and the Power Search link is blue. Also, they are off to the far right. They should be closer to the, e.g., "6 of 206 records", text.*
- *The best way was to click "Quick Search" again at the top. User used the browser back button a lot.*

12. When I am inside a record, how do I get back to the list of results?

Not clear at all. Most used browser back button. A couple found the table view option but stated very emphatically that this is not intuitive – they found it by chance.

13. How do I rank results?

Question not worded well. Most respondents said "doesn't it do that automatically?"

14. What does putting a record in my basket mean? Does the basket icon make sense?

Basket icon makes sense by itself, but it's not clear where to go from there (need to go to "my search tools"). Users are looking for another shopping cart to go to.

Find e-Resources

1. Is it clear why I'd use the Title vs. the Locate tab?

2 yes's
5 no's
- *Once you look at the options for each it becomes more clear.*
- *Can't think of many circumstances in which "Locate" would be used. It seems redundant.*
- *Very confusingly presented (Locate, that is).*

2. When I do a Title search, is it clear what the icons associated with each resource will do?

Generally yes, although half said that although "i" is standard, they had to use the rollover to figure out what the "+" and magnifying glass were for. One request for a legend rather than a rollover.

3. Is it useful to have an "e-Resource Vendor" search option under the "Locate" tab?

1 yes
4 no's
- *Can't think of a good reason to have it.*
- *Likely to be confusing to most users who don't really know the difference between vendors, databases, publishers, etc.*

4. Is the option to search all categories obvious?

2 yes's
6 no's
- *One assumption that "search all" is the default.*
- *One assumption that "select category" searches all.*
- *One user found "all categories".*

Find e-Journals

1. How do I know how many results were found after a search?

Inconsistent, depending on which search you do. "Begins with" doesn't' give you a number so you have to count. "Contains" and "Exact" both give a count at the top of the results list, but the color (grey) is not very visible. Also, "Locate" tab seems redundant. One user expressed frustration with their inability to jump to the later part of a long list of journals – you have to "next" through all the pages to move forward.

General

1. Do error messages tell me how to solve the problem?

5 never saw error messages, so didn't know. One got " you must select at least one database," which was instructive.

2. Are error messages highly visible?

Most n/a. One comment: The system displays errors (tells you what the problem is) but you have to be resourceful in order to figure out how to resolve it.

3. Is there enough guidance in the interface?

Overall, it's ok but could be better, especially in the beginning search screens. "Help" link is very small so not easy to find. Problems seem to center around terminology (labels) and not so much with the actual interface functionality.

4. Is it clear that text serving as links are links?

5 yes's (for the most part)
3 no's
- *Gray text doesn't look like active link – it looks deactivated because of the color unless you mouse over it.*

5. Is the text easy to read?

Overall, yes. A couple of comment about gray-on-gray not providing enough contrast, and on request for bigger fonts.

6. Does the system let me know what it's doing?

Most answered "sort of" or "sometimes."
- *Not always clear what the system is doing. For example, why are 2018 records retrieved, but only 31 displayed as "results"?*
- *The intermediate "databases loading" page was a little off-putting at first but ultimately better than waiting without indication. In the end, probably a wise decision.*
- *It gives decent feedback while doing a cross-search (retrieving, etc.) It gives no feedback at all after clicking the basket icon. This was very disconcerting – did it actually do anything? Where is the basket that it used?*

7. Are saving records formats explained?

5 no's
2 yes's
- *Explained well enough in the Help, but first you have to find the help, which isn't easy.*

8. Are icons displayed and/or explained properly?

Again, explained well in Help, if you get there. Also, multiple requests for a standard SFX button or text that says "full text here" or something of the sort.

9. Is help available? Can you easily find the link to help? Are the help instructions complete and easy to understand?

Yes. Another couple of comments about size/placement of link to Help (could be bigger/more visible) and one suggestion that a link to Ask Us be added.