Promoting Open-Access Adoption Through a User Experience Approach: A Case Study of a University Repository

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Introduction. This paper details how a university library in Australia re-designed its institutional repository (IR) based on user studies and usability principles. It highlights the importance of engaging with researchers and faculty members in gaining buy-in and support for the repository, and how successful collaboration can foster increased usage and reach of open access materials.

Literature Review. Librarians and scholars are now working closely together more than ever before to re-examine the assumptions of traditional scholarly publishing in the new digital environment. Institutional repositories (IR) provide a low- cost and accessible platform to archive scholarly information, yet they are often under-utilised and infrequently accessed. Despite such promise, it would appear that researchers and practitioners approach it very differently. Librarians often view the IR as an organisational information resource to be managed, and are often unaware of the issues concerning researchers around tenure, impact factors, career development and academic freedom, all of which limit their participation in the IR. (Kim, 2011; Bell, 2005). Publisher licensing policies are often challenging to interpret, and consequently many academics feel that it would be safer not to self-archive in OA repositories. Librarians are often tasked with providing support to faculties on research outputs, though many do not have sufficient training in understanding issues such as the workflow of researchers (MacMillan, 2014). Repositories are often challenging to implement, with standard software packages such as DSpace, Digital Commons, and e-Prints proving time-consuming and complicated to install and configure (Körber & Suleman, 2008). Finally, the usability issue of repositories is also a barrier to adoption (MacKay, 2007).

Methodology. The issues around institutional repositories as described above led us to consider a user experience approach (Garrett, 2010) to redesign the institutional repository as a large Australian university. The initial usability testing provided us with a detailed report on the repository that included usability analysis, metadata recommendations for SEO discovery, navigability, and design recommendations. The report used a range of usability, accessibility, and information architecture tools and methodologies, including a usability and Information Architecture review checklist

report, the WAVE Accessibility Tools, a Heuristic Evaluation as well as user journey mapping and workflow analysis. The IR failed a number of usability and accessibility standards and best practice for user interface. Alongside, we conducted a study of academics and their reasons for adoption or lack of adoption, which reinforced many of the issues we found in the usability testing, and also emphasised some of the issues from the literature.

Redesign. This research-informed study and redesign that was a result of a collaboration between library practitioners and researchers, was theoretically grounded in user experience principles, and resulted in a complete re-design of the repository, replacing the native D-Space interface with a customised, interactive interface that addressed many of the usability issues.

Conclusion. Based on increased engagement with the Repository after the user research and the resulting redesign, we argue that greater collaboration between library staff and researchers is essential. Furthermore, consultation with all end users - be they authors, fellow researchers or other information seekers - is necessary in developing a system that satisfies each user group.

References

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