

Library portal for round the clock librarianship

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ABSTRACT

This paper emphasizes the need and design of library portal for the professionals to give better services to its end-user in the era of Information Technology. A library portal is a single access point combining the library catalogues, subscription databases, subject gateways, electronic journals etc., Library portal meets the individual needs of users, which either the system itself can tailor the delivery and presentation of information content or the users themselves can customize the type and format of information displayed. Library portal is now the standard interface to generate library resources and services through a single access and management point for users. This paper concludes with the significance of library portals from the view point of professionals and users and its benefits to the user community.

Key Words: Library Portal, Round the clock librarianship.

INTRODUCTION

Libraries have crossed many borders while transitioning from their ancient and middle ages counter-parts to the contemporary ones. During the middle ages, books and manuscripts were chained to shelves mainly for the purpose of protection as they were extremely valuable those days. There are even examples of library readers being locked in cages, so that books could not wander. Therefore it has been a long and progressive journey for the profession of librarianship since the times of the Ancient Library of Alexandria of the 3rd century BC-probably the largest and certainly the most famous of the libraries of the ancient world. From Callimachus - the poet and scholar with the Alexandrian Library and considered the first bibliographer to Library Thing the notion of library services have been metamorphosed.

Now a days, when most library users prefers to access information from the convenience of their desktops, laptops and mobiles, it is but

natural that libraries move from onsite library services to web based library services. Web based library services have evolved from OPAC to Virtual Reference Services. The opportunity for the users to participate and be engaged in the library processes and services offered by the newer library tools is not only exciting but has changed the notion and landscape of library services. There is enhanced value to the libraries and the users alike in the new paradigm.

WEB PORTAL

Technically, a portal is a web based information system service that brings together content from various distributed resources and systems using information technologies into an amalgamated form as a presentation service to the user. This presentation is usually via a web based information system with 24x7 support, though other methods are also possible. For users, a portal is a, possibly personalized common point of access where information is available and a drilldown can be carried out across one or more resources and the compounded results are seen.

For the library fraternity the portal is a single access point combining the library catalogues, subscription databases, subject gateways, electronic journals etc., Library portal meets the

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In the early years, what we now call portal was called as "search engine". In the next stage of development, 'navigation sites' became the term used to describe the functions available at Excite, Infoseek, Lycos and Yahoo. The third and most recent stage of development introduced the new term of "portal".

Major Benefits of Portal

It is of four kind viz.,

Institutional benefit:- The institute will gain by having

1. a paperless office
2. transparency and consistency in governance
3. a data warehouse of information is a great asset for staff
4. greater ease of information sharing and exchange
5. access to current information by administrative staff, faculty, students, alumni and other stakeholders. This will help to meet the institutes needs to be transparent and consistent in dealings with any type of task.
6. Quality assurance that processes will be facilitated and there will be quality enhancement of teaching and learning embedded with student support.
7. Plenty of time to upgrade their skills and proficiency

Faculty benefit :- The teaching community will gain

1. confidence in the quality information and in the efficiency in intra and inter departmental procedures.

2. having a more common set of administration procedures and forms across department. This will assist faculty teaching and administration across several programs.

3. complete and current department information, documentation, regulations, calendars, forms and guidance notes will easily be accessible and this will ensure fairness, consistence and coherence in managing students and in offering students support.

4. controlled access to student and department data. This will be an improvement on the current management of students and department information, better and more secure storage and information being directed to targeted end-users.

5. having access to current student information on a need-to-know-basis, for example their progress and grades and any issues that may cause concern.

Student benefit :- The student community are the most benefited patrons of portal.

1. students will be able to access full and current information about all aspects of the department and their individual course through it.

2. all guidance note, handbooks and forms to support administrative requirements will be easily accessible in the student information and resources area.

3. Ease of access to information, timetables and communication updated will encourage learners.

4. The inclusion of message boards, individual message alerts on individual student homepages, teaching and learning materials and full department guidance should reduce their needs to access staff/faculty for routine matters and encourage a greater sense of confidence in being able to manage their own learning.

5. The portal will enhance the quality of the learning experience. There will be online learning support materials, access to learning resources for each unit and online student group communication to facilitate peer group discussion. Such resource can be accessed as students identity their own learning needs.

6. The student file will have a section designated as a personal development and learning portfolio and full guidance notes to support its use.

Administrative Staff benefits:- There are a number of very significant benefits for administrative staff.

1. There will be significant time save in answering routine and other enquires through being able to undertake simple database searches.

2. The integrated nature of the system will allow for greater proactive in program administration, for eg. the monitoring of unit choice and co- monitoring of class sizes and therefore better allocation of teaching rooms and management of library resources.

3. Increased productivity

Reduces paper transaction and produces reliable information.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PORTAL

Accenture (Accenture Higher Education Survey) defines characteristics of the portal within the frame work of Higher Education as follows:

1. Gateway that provides a single point of entry to information and tools.
2. Web-based aggregation point
3. Targeted used group
4. My "homepage" or "Library"
5. Accessible from anywhere anytime

SIGNIFICANCE OF LIBRARY PORTAL

Library portal is growing in its importance as the preferred way of organisation and using information. Web portals are seen as positive potential frameworks for achieving order out of chaos. As portals became a primary means for transaction information and commerce, libraries of all types are becoming involved in thinking, planning and building various

frameworks and services. Library portal reduces the barrier of users having to remember multiple log-on. The portal gives the library a tool to channel users towards preferred resources. It increases the ability of the library to ensure that costly electronic journals and databases are used, by offering a simple way to browse the available resources. It supports searching by carrying users through from bibliographic searches to full text option.

ELEMENTS OF LIBRARY PORTAL

The library portal are changing rapidly, but some of the major elements to be considered while designing the library portal are as follows:

1. Ease of use, 2. Search and navigation
3. Resource linking, 4. Personalization
5. User authentication, 6. Interactive service

The role of librarian is much more than the educators, who organize and evaluate information resources, since academic librarians bring unique perspectives and skills to the development of portals in their colleges and universities to campus portal planning and implementation they bring their expertise with content, their knowledge of copyright, their commitment to customer service and their experience in creating customized web-based information deliver systems.

FACETS OF THE LIBRARY PORTAL

The various facets of the library portal are

LIBRARY INFORMATION

Library Profile

Provides information about the working hours, library collection, membership details, borrowing eligibility, library staff, details of the faculty of the campus, the floor plan of the library and the intellectual contribution of the library user community.

Services

Both traditional services and value added e-information services are listed to give an overview of the library services offered.

News & Event

Information regarding forthcoming seminars, conferences or workshops organized by the department of the campus, orientation programmes for research scholars, refresher courses for faculty etc., are periodically furnished.

Photo Gallery

Displays an image gallery of the events organized by the library such as workshops, orientation programmes, faculty interaction programs and also those associated with the librarian who spearheads and participates in various events.

SEARCH FACILITY

Member Status and Account

The library members could check out the transactions about what documents are due to be returned and could renew the borrowing period from their desktop without having to walk into the library.

Resource Search

The OPAC accessible to search for the books they require, the number of copies available and status of transaction. The resource can be searched on various parameters such as author, key word, title, accession number, subject headings etc.,

E-Alerts

Electronic Alerts of table of contents of important journals, events and happenings at campus, the transaction of library and other library alerts are posted for browsing.

Journals Subscribed

The currently subscribed print journals and the archive of subscribed journals can be searched for availability with details of missing volumes and the receipt date of latest issues. This enables the end-user to know if the current issue is displayed for use thus saving their precious time.

INFONET Journals and Databases

The e-resources under the UGC INFONET Consortia both electronic journals and databases can be searched alphabetically, by subject coverage or by publisher. The links created at the portal for journals in the consortia helps the user access the home page of the journals right away and download the full text articles required. There has been an overwhelming appreciation for this facility because of the ease at which they can access electronic resources.

Subject Gateways

The library has been indeed very proactive in extending exclusive support to the research done in the campus. Subject gateways or compilation of electronic resources on themes with specific focus areas prove as strong linkages to enhance research.

Methodology

The data required to be uploaded on the portal is done periodically. Constant scrutiny, reviewing, evaluation of resources, removing dead links forms the back end tasks.

PLANNING OF A WEB PORTAL IN LIBRARIES

Planning is a very important part of web page development. One may plan web portal pages through different ways. Internal planning includes the following points:

1. Forming the project team.
2. Kinds of information resources.
3. Presentation of information.
4. Size of the page for download purpose.

5. Should the page be static or interactive?
6. Will the contents be useful enough for visitors to refer again?
7. Information about last update.
8. Future improvements.
9. Tracking results and responding to visitor feed back.
10. Revising Page.

Some of the practical suggestions would be given for efficient and effective use and functions of library portals are as follows:

Web/portal designers

1. Should develop sites that allow for a variety of input and output devices.
2. Should provide a text equipment for any non text element.
3. Should allow users to modify rendering of page content and override the designer's specified control settings.
4. Should use multimedia tools, if necessary
5. Should title framers with meaningful text that allows users to effectively identify and navigate through each frame.
5. Should allow users to skip repetitive navigational links
6. Should provide dues to help users be aware of their location program and status with a web page.
7. Should provide online help and use language that makes with the site easy.

ADVANTAGES OF DESIGNING LIBRARY PORTALS

Major benefits of using library portals are as follows:

Cost Savings

Decreasing the number of print copies of various news letters, sending a soft copy of the document to a far-off laboratory through the network, where it can be reproduced, thus saving the transport cost and time. Lowering the cost of handling and transporting paper forms by creating and handling electronic forms. Lowering of travel cost by providing online training.

Time Savings

Disseminate information instantly. Reduce support time and energy by human resource, administration, finance, help desk and so on. Minimise time spent on learning specialized software applications through easy-to-use web browser. Reduce time required to set up database account inquires.

Increased functionality

Gain global access to information at the speed of light. Seamlessly connect workgroups and offices. Keep data up to date expands knowledge by activating additional levels of details as needed. One of the most important benefits of web portal can be it connects the various aspects of the organisation viz, top officials can communicate effectively and directly with all the employees. Functionally related but geographically disconnected workgroups can work together.

CONCLUSION

Libraries are rapidly expanding the web-based delivery of content and related access services in order to meet the changing needs and expectations of their users. In the short span of period that the web has existed, libraries have made great advances in their ability to provide web-based access to a wide variety information access services that were only available within the walls of the library.

Librarians have become increasingly aware that the multiplication of electronic resources is a problem for end-users. Users find it difficult to locate the most appropriate databases or resource to search for information relevant to their need. This new reality translates into the need for making library web environments effective and useful. Portals are transformational environments that address the problem of information. But by customizing information content to meet specific needs of the end-users.

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