FindIt@WMU aka FindIt@WMU

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Online access to full-text journal, magazine, and newspaper articles as well as e-books has become one of most-requested library resources by the users of the WMU University Libraries. To provide that access, special software has been incorporated in our various database systems. This sophisticated software oversees multiple full-text electronic sources by providing connections between our licensed vendors of full text and the citations located by users; the valued result is a simple FindIt@WMU link.

The OpenURL software is a unique product of the digital generation that utilizes the uniform resource locator standard. The OpenURL protocol was developed by the National Information Standards Organization (NISO) and has been adopted by several major electronic resource providers. OpenURL software creates connections from specific articles indexed in several hundred bibliographic databases licensed by the University Libraries to the online text of the article. The software framework is used to construct URLs in such a way that connections can be made between various databases. Users get seamless access to the full text of the article or publication wherever it may exist within the system.

What does this really mean?

For almost two decades, library users have used electronic indexing and abstracting databases to search the archives of hundreds of journals faster and more accurately than manual methods. However, the best list of references is most valuable when the full text of each citation can be quickly retrieved as well. Before selected databases offered full text that linked to the citations, the full text of articles was retrieved by a laborious and time-consuming process that involved locating a “call number” in the Libraries’ catalog and finding, on the library shelves, a print copy of the articles. This slow process became less and less acceptable as new digital technologies came into play. The sciences, in particular, followed by the social sciences and the humanities, began providing full text “right on the screen,” ready to print and available from any geographical location that could access the Libraries’ licensed material via the Web. Unfortunately, indexing and abstracting databases offer different amounts of full text coverage. For example, not everything (articles, reviews, editorials, etc.) in a given issue or journal may be available in full text in a given database; different journals have different dates of full text coverage; and, in some instances, the most recent and/or older issues are still available only in print. Who would organize all of these sources and provide users with answers? The answer was the OpenURL software.

Step by step

At this time, the University Libraries have over 400 electronic indexing and abstracting databases that are searchable by students, faculty, and staff. The Libraries’ Web site at www.wmich.edu/library/ offers an Articles by Topic search box on the right hand side of the main page. The ProQuest search line leads the user to a general index called ProQuest Research Library. Typing in keywords from almost any discipline will retrieve scholarly journal citations as well as popular and trade magazine and newspaper references. Let’s run a search and see one example of how FindIt@WMU locates full text through the University Libraries—either online or in print.

If one enters the phrase attention deficit disorder into the right hand search box on the Libraries’ main screen and clicks on the “Go” button, over 6,600 citations are retrieved. A second click in the Suggested Topics box on the same page, attention deficit disorder, will take the searcher to the “official” phrase results of 3,500 citations. As one scans the results, it is quickly evident from the icons under each citation which citations have “built in” full text. A click retrieves that material. But what if the entry notes only an Abstract and Find a copy icon? Here’s where OpenURL is a fantastic aide to the user. When one clicks on the “Find a copy” link under the article title “Improving Homework in Adolescents with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder,” a screen appears. On the upper right hand side of the Document View screen, there is a box: FindIt@WMU. Click on it and another screen appears with the FindIt@WMU menu that identifies other online, linked database(s) that do contain the full text, has a link to our library catalog, and if neither is a source of the text, the user can immediately order a copy online through interlibrary loan—from the same FindIt@WMU screen.

Also on the screen that appeared when the user clicks on FindIt@WMU are other tools to assist in using and evaluating this article. There is a link to the bibliographic citation tool RefWorks. By linking to this tool, the user can create and store a citation to each article or document that s/he wishes to record. These “referrals” can be combined with other citations to create article bibliographies. A second valuable tool is the ability to create a Persistent link to the article. Links can also be used to create a URL which can then used establish a permanent link to the article. These links can be used to reference articles in course management software, bibliographic references, and so on. Finally, there is a link to Ulrichsweb.com. By linking to this resource, information about the journal where the article is located can be displayed. Information in Ulrich’s indicates whether the journal is peer reviewed or scholarly, impact factor, and more. Finally, there is a “Help” link on each screen that will give tips on making all of these options most useful to you.

Other databases may show the gold FindIt@WMU button in different locations on the database screen, but each link works the same magic and provides direct access to our subscribed full text wherever it may be found. In a second example, let’s go to the discipline-oriented database called Scopus that provides many references to the research literature of the sciences and social sciences. Again using the term attention deficit disorder, we use the Basic Search line and set no limitations. The result, at the time searched, was over 3,700 hits. When scanning the entries, users will note that each citation has three boxes: Abstract + Refs, a FindIt@WMU link, and Full Text—right from the results screen. In this index, each one of the entries contains the gold FindIt@WMU button. Alternately, the same search, if conducted in PsycINFO results in 10,700 search results. On many of the search results the gold FindIt@WMU button is displayed. In a nutshell, FindIt@WMU links most citations found when searching an index to hundreds of online databases that provide full text OR links to our catalog OR, if all else fails, to interlibrary loan.

Another major benefit of the OpenURL system is an electronic journal finder. If you have a complete citation to a journal including the journal title, this search will
determine if, where, and how much of the text of a particular title can be found through our Web site. That information can be accessed from our main screen by using the left hand search box and selecting, from the drop down menu, FIND JOURNALS BY TITLE. Simply type in the title of the journal in the Quick Search box and the menu screen will appear with the same information for that journal as noted above. The location of the electronic journal finder can also be accessed at http://www.wmich.edu/library/journals/ where you can fill out an online citation form with the article title, journal title, and other information and use that link to discover our subscribed electronic or print resources. Note, however, that this site is searching for WMU's access to a journal, magazine, or newspaper, i.e., periodical titles, not for individual articles per se.

The OpenURL protocol has also found acceptance among various Web search services. The popularity of the OpenURL protocol has extended to Google Scholar (http://scholar.google.com/) and Live Search Academic (http://academic.live.com/). While neither Live Search Academic nor Google Scholar supports the addition of the gold FindIt@WMU button, there are links to our resource discovery tool. Look for the text link FindIt@WMU displayed on the search results. This will create the FindIt@WMU menu, offering the user identical features.

What needs to be clearly understood from this brief summary of OpenURL is that thousands and thousands of full text articles, searchable through hundreds of databases, are now a “click away” for any user who is affiliated with Western Michigan University. Every WMU user can search, select, and, within seconds, begin to read key research, scholarly studies, literature reviews, national and international newspapers, popular magazines, technical reports, government documents, and a world of other information in multiple formats. Amazing technology, indeed, to find it in the University Libraries.