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Insights

Thomson Reuters-Google Scholar Linkage Offers Big Win for STM Users and Publishers

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A new partnership promises to make citation research and analysis easier for researchers and libraries alike.

Important Details

Doing citation research and analysis just got a whole lot easier. Thomson Reuters' Web of Knowledge and Google Scholar are announcing a major new partnership between their services at this week's Charleston Conference. This summer, the two companies piloted linking their content at more than 125 leading university research institutions worldwide. When Google Scholar users at the participating institutions hit the Scholar search results page, they see a new Web of Science link directly in the results, under the article preview, as part of Scholar's familiar navigation bar. On Web of Science, subscribers now can move directly from a Web of Science record to a Scholar search on the same item. Thomson Reuters' reports it saw a 2-3 times spike in its traffic at the pilot sites, perhaps not surprising given Scholar's role as the starting point for many researchers.

The two companies had discussions over the years about closer interlinking from open web search to the Web of Science's article citation records. But the deal did not materialize until earlier this year with Thomson Reuters' Scholarly and Scientific Research Managing Director Gordon Macomber's arrival at the Thomson Reuters Intellectual Property & Science business unit. Thomson Reuters conducted specific market research on end-user and librarian needs. The linkage to Google Scholar was near the top of the list. Macomber observed that if users weren't one click away from connecting their research tools to researcher needs, a service like Web of Science could become much less relevant.

With this philosophy, the deal between the two giants occurred quickly. The program is designed to work in conjunction with Google's Library Links, article-level links to subscription full text for patrons affiliated with a participating library. The new reciprocal linking functionality will roll out to the 4,000+ Web of Science academic customer base over the next two to three months with the goal of January 2014 completion.

While Thomson Reuters is the first STM player to work with Google in this highly integrated manner, the relationship is non-exclusive. So, the door is now open to the other major scientific index players,

Elsevier's Scopus and NIH's PubMed Central, to enter into a reciprocal linking arrangement. (Scholar already indexes PubMed Central and provides easy links from search to the service, but PMC does not facilitate the return to Google Scholar.)

The partnership specifically benefits scientists and researchers performing in-depth citation history research. These end-users need such functionality to understand how a particular piece of content — journal article, conference proceeding or research data — impacts other researchers. Citation metrics are particularly useful in helping researchers find the right co-authors and collaborators for funding.

Implications

Who does this relationship benefit more — Google Scholar or Thomson Reuters? The answer is both, in spades. But, most importantly, relationships such as this one benefit STM end-users, who face myriad issues when conducting basic research in today's complex and cross-disciplinary scientific information landscape (see Outsell's Market Report, *Research Analytics in STM: Current Issues & Outlook*, published April 1, 2013).

Study after study comparing Google Scholar, Web of Science, Scopus, and PubMed Central show that each service has its particular strengths and weaknesses in terms of coverage. So, the STM researcher must either know — or learn the hard way — these differences, conducting repetitive searches on different services. In today's time-crunched world, researchers usually do not tolerate this approach for very long, so biases creep into their search behaviors.

Google Scholar has naturally benefited from its position as a free, easy-to-use service. But using Scholar alone for research impact analysis is not always the best or most thorough approach because its indexed content base is purposefully less filtered. For example, it includes pre-print and non-peer reviewed content — all potentially useful, but sometimes adding to the noise for researchers. Users typically find more than they need on Google Scholar and have to de-dupe and sort through the results.

Thomson Reuters recognizes the next best approach to a difficult-to-achieve “one stop” service is the Google Scholar “one-click” partnership. It is likely to please the company's end-users and library customer base. Moreover, the company is not charging a separate fee for the integration, understanding that the traffic benefits to its Web of Science platform will pay off at renewal time when institutional customers measure substantially increased usage. The partnership is a win-win for all parties vs. a competitive threat. It addresses the realities of today's scientific research environment for researchers and the librarians who support them. It is hard not to imagine that the other major players in the space, Elsevier's Scopus and NIH's PubMed Central, as well as smaller specialized abstracts and indexes will want to do the same thing.

Of course, Google Scholar's utility increases with such partnerships. Some STM publishers still fear being disintermediated, despite Scholar's history of driving large amounts of traffic to their websites. In fact, a large chunk of STM transactional revenue might not even occur without Google Scholar. Scholarly publishers' real concern ought to be a Google decision to kill Scholar, which has now

existed for 10 years without a visible business model. Despite Google's denials and "no-comments," Scholar is still susceptible to a potential cutback. On the other hand, with the new Web of Science relationship and others like it, Google Scholar reinforces its position as a singular discovery tool — and that fulfills on Google's ongoing mission to organize the world's information.

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