Don't Make Me Choose! (or, Just Get What I Need!): Making It Simple to Borrow

Libraries face a daunting challenge in trying to make the resources and services they offer simple for users to discover and navigate. The Brown University Library participates in three consortial borrowing systems which have vastly increased the volume of material available to our users. Complexity and confusion are unwanted by-products of this increased wealth; different proprietary systems with different interfaces, authentication methods, renewal policies, and the necessity to re-key searches in each system. Not only is this arrangement inconvenient for users, it also results in a significant percentage of requests going to the service that provides the item most slowly, and that is most costly for the Library.

Our solution, currently called *easyBorrow*, is a locally developed system which was launched in beta version in June, 2007. The system uses WorldCat as the starting point for locating a desired item. When a user clicks "Request this item", the system first performs a lookup in our OPAC, checking location and availability. If a circulating copy is available, the user is redirected to the OPAC record. If no copy is available, the user is directed to an authentication screen and places his or her request. The *easyBorrow* system displays a message that the request was accepted and that an email with details will follow shortly. Behind the scenes, the *easyBorrow* system queries and attempts to place the user's request in the most appropriate service. If the request cannot be placed in the first system, it will try the second and third if necessary; if still not found, the request will go to our Interlibrary Loan service (ILLiad), automatically registering new users. Requests and results are recorded in a database that can be viewed by staff should a problem arise; this database gives us the ability to analyze and report on all of our borrowing activity via a single interface. Users can also access this data to track all of their requests in a single interface.

Our service-oriented-architecture allows others to adapt components of the open-source code. Our implementation uses PHP, Tomcat, and Django to build a dozen web-APIs coordinated by a Python script; a Java layer manages tunneling into the various services.

In the coming months we will develop partnerships with other libraries, add new functionalities, and analyze the impact of this service on users and staff. We expect that by November our LITA presentation will cover these areas as well, and that we will be able to generalize on the success of this, and similar, projects.

See:
http://dl.lib.brown.edu/libweb/services/easyBorrow.php (public site)
http://dl.lib.brown.edu/its/software/easyborrow/ (documentation)

Level: Basic/Intermediate
Session Type: Concurrent
Source: NGC4LIB listserv

Jean Rainwater is co-leader of Integrated Technology Services at the Brown University Library. ITS is responsible for production of digital materials, digitization of signature collections, consultative services for digital projects, database and programming services, software support and development, OPAC, Library website, Library technology infrastructure and staff technology training and support. Recent successful projects include a Digital Bookplating system, a Course Reserves system with faculty, student, and staff interfaces for requesting, viewing, managing, and tracking digital and analog reserves in all formats, and many other database/web programming applications. Presentation experience: ELUNA 2006, Innovative Users Group, 2008 (proposal on digital bookplates accepted).

Bonnie Buzzell, Senior Knowledge Management Librarian, Brown University Library, has a diverse background in public and technical services. Her current responsibilities focus on adapting technology to library staff and users' needs. She was also involved in the Digital Bookplating and online Course Reserve projects, and oversees the library's integrated library system. Presentation experience: Innovative Users Group, 2008 (proposal on digital bookplates accepted); *easyBorrow* presentations were made at 5 Minute Madness at LITA 2007, and Boston Library Consortium Shared Resources Day, summer 2007.

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