

# GETTING THE GOOD (FREE) STUFF ONLINE

Information in the digital world has burgeoned dramatically over the past 10 years. Information professionals now find themselves in an environment where information is coming from everywhere at once: social networking sites, blogs, wikis, Open Access (OA) books and monographs, forums and discussion groups, videos, mobile apps...

These phenomena were the starting point for Taylor & Francis to put on their thinking caps and explore the key issues librarians are experiencing when it comes to the discoverability of free content. This article is a précis of the White Paper prepared for ALIA's Future of the Profession discussions, titled *Facilitating Discovery of Free Online Resources: Challenges and Opportunities for the Library Community*.

As part of our commitment to supporting the academic and library communities, we decided to research how librarians, striving to best serve their end users' needs, make free content fully integrated and searchable within the library online public

in academic institutions for research and teaching, to understand how librarians help users to recognise quality and relevance in non-purchased resources. We aimed to identify any perceived problems with using non-purchased content and understand how librarians

demonstrate the value of non-purchased resources. We wanted to start a debate on the next generation of publishing activities so that we could start solving some existing issues across the industry by

commissioning research on the discoverability of free online resources.

We used a variety of primary research methods to collect research intelligence that was as representative as possible. The research was run from our UK offices, and included responses from initial phone interviews with our library and information science editors, focus groups in the UK and the US, in-depth tele-interviews (with UK librarians) and an online survey that elicited over 500 responses. We also conducted desk research to support our findings on the discovery of free online resources to represent the views of as many librarians as possible.

Our primary research explored the following key seven themes and the full paper examines each of these. They are:

## 'Free-to-access' doesn't necessarily mean 'easy-to-find'

access catalogue (OPAC). We intended to identify the challenges that librarians face in facilitating access to free online resources, while continuing to manage paid resources as they have traditionally done.

Free resources could potentially be of great value in all aspects of education: teaching, learning and research, but the challenge lies in librarians determining the value of all these online resources when 'free-to-access' doesn't necessarily mean 'easy-to-find'. Users are increasingly overwhelmed with content and find it difficult to navigate effectively through what is available in order to apply it in their research, studies or teaching. In helping users to navigate this non-purchased content, librarians often have no ownership in the traditional sense of library acquisition, and often no usage statistics by which to gauge relevance.

We wanted to define the types of non-purchased content currently being used



## 1. Growth and value of free content

Free content is growing rapidly. How librarians sift through this volume of material to identify what high quality free resources should be brought to the attention of their patrons.



## 2. Resource challenges for librarians

Making free resources discoverable takes up staff time – how can library and information professionals ensure that bringing together free and paid content is worth the effort when no metrics are available to identify an institution's performance?



### 3. Identification and selection of content

Currently it is a challenge simply to identify access restrictions to content. Many librarians comment that the lack of metadata makes the management of free online resources difficult and unpredictable. Free content can also be subject to a variety of licences, with no easy way to identify reuse terms. What do library and information professionals require in their new role as facilitators of free online content? What are the current attitudes towards free and paid for content?

Taylor & Francis is supporting all the current Open Access mandates and working with authors, institutions, funders and policy makers to ensure we develop robust, transparent and trusted services for all involved. We have author rights policies that allow for posting of author manuscripts post-peer review (post-prints) on institutional repositories, supporting the Australian Research Council's recent Green Open Access mandate.

Under our Library and Information Science (LIS) pilot program, which has been running since 2011, authors in our LIS journals can freely post their



### 4. The role of the library

The research has revealed that the role of library and information professionals relating to the facilitating of free online content falls into two key areas, these being evaluation and selecting resources following a clear methodology and providing guidelines and training.

Collaboration is the key to success in the searchability and permanence of free content.



### 5. Information literacy

Moving out of the library and into their community, and in particular forging links with faculty, appears to be a key priority for many of the librarians who participated in our research.

post-prints immediately on publication, without any embargo. We have already reached agreement with a number of repositories such as PubMedCentral and the World Bank to deposit the author-accepted manuscript directly to the repository on behalf of authors to enable them to fulfil their funder mandates, and we see this program expanding further in future. Details of our current LIS Author Rights Policy can be found on our website: [journalauthors.tandf.co.uk/preparation/lisrights.asp](http://journalauthors.tandf.co.uk/preparation/lisrights.asp)



### 6. User needs and expectations

User behaviours and expectations are changing. We asked librarians about their plans for improving their discoverability services for users, to identify what they feel is of the greatest importance to support users when discovering free content.

The Taylor & Francis White Paper uses the results and findings from our research to explore the above themes in more detail in order to draw conclusions about what our research means for the library and publishing community, as well as for Taylor & Francis. It looks at challenges that are faced by library and information professionals and publishers, and how they, and aggregators, are responding to the changes. It then addresses the next steps at the face of this burgeoning of digital content. Ultimately, the key message that emerges from our research is that collaboration is the key to success in the searchability and permanence of free content.

This is just the start of a conversation, so please download the White Paper, view the supplementary data, sign up to webinars and let us know what you think: [explore.tandfonline.com/lmt/discoverability](http://explore.tandfonline.com/lmt/discoverability).

For further information please contact the Taylor & Francis Melbourne office: [enquiries@tandf.com.au](mailto:enquiries@tandf.com.au).



### 7. The role of publishers

Librarians' views are split on the role that publishers should take in helping solve some of these problems. Nevertheless, there are clear areas where publishers can provide support. Ultimately publishers generally need to continue to support collaborative efforts to provide industry-level safety nets that tackle issues of preservation, indexing, measurement and evaluation.