Information Scotland
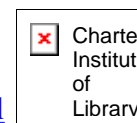
The Journal of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals in Scotland

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Behind the Screens: Access

Many routes to discovery

A number of recent developments behind the screen have the potential for improving access to the content of collections, writes Gordon Dunsire.

Although the examples given below have all involved the Centre for Digital Library Research (CDLR), they are indicative of the general level and direction of activity occurring in Scotland and beyond.

The improvement of access to the content of this journal, Information Scotland, is a good case study. The feature content of the journal is made available online after the printed version is distributed; the entire back-run from Vol.1, no.1 (Feb 2003) is published via the SAPIENS service, with each article accessible from its own URL. SAPIENS provides a simple search engine for the full-text of its journals which can be used to find articles from the back-run. Google also indexes the full-text of the Information Scotland articles, so there are three distinct routes to resource discovery and access: Browsing the issue and contents menus in SAPIENS, using the SAPIENS search engine, and using Google (and other whole-Web search engines). Metadata in the shape of a MARC21 record is created for each article, using the OCLC Connexion service. This process adds the record to OCLC WorldCat, which is available in full as an online subscription service taken by many libraries. A cut-down version of WorldCat is freely available on the Web.

This adds two further routes to Information Scotland, although one is restricted to password-holders. The MARC21 record is also copied and downloaded from Connexion to the SLAINTE digital library, where it can be searched along with other library-related online resources. This is route number six. The SLAINTE digital library is a member of CAIRNS, so journal articles are included in general CAIRNS search results, and results from the metasearch service of the Scottish Distributed Digital Library (SDDL) That's another two routes.

Most recently, the Information Scotland metadata has been used as a testbed for the Stargate (Static repository gateway) project. This involved transforming the MARC21 record to Dublin Core format using a tool available in Connexion; no re-keying of the metadata was required. The DC records were then packaged in an XML file compliant with the static repository specification for the Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting, see the OAISIS service. The resulting static repository was then published on the Web and registered with the Stargate gateway. The gateway service allows the repository to be harvested by metadata aggregation services providing an

information retrieval facility for multiple repositories, similar to the idea of a library union catalogue. The Information Scotland XML file can be used by a human to identify individual articles, although it is not very user-friendly; this is another discovery route. Better still is to use the Experimental discovery service which aggregates the static and institutional repositories available in Scotland. You can find Information Scotland listed as an 'archive' in this service, which was developed as part of the Harvesting Institutional Resources in Scotland Testbed (HaIRST) project. This is route number 10. In addition, all repositories available in the UK and US are also harvested by the OAIster service, making it route number 11. In fact, any aggregation service can harvest Information Scotland metadata, so there may be additional discovery routes that CDLR and CILIPS are unaware of. So there are at least 10 different seamless ways of finding and using Information Scotland without requiring passwords.
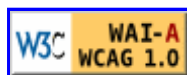
This is a somewhat artificial situation, arising from the continuing collaboration between CDLR, CILIPS and SLIC, and in practice it is likely that any particular electronic journal would not employ every one of these resource discovery channels. But it is highly likely that more than one channel will be used in the future, with a significant improvement in access to the content. Anyone interested in using the static repository approach is welcome to contact CDLR; the Stargate gateway will be maintained for at least a year.

The use of open access repositories for the research output of Scotland is being explored in the Institutional Repository Infrastructure for Scotland (IRIScotland) project and wiki. CDLR is involved in developing a pilot resource discovery service for the project. We have also been involved in investigating the use of repositories to expose online content resulting from administrative activities, initially as part of the HaIRST project, and more recently in relation to metadata workflows and interoperability as part of the Managing Digital Assets in Tertiary Education (Mandate) project. In particular, the minutes of CILIPS Council and Committee meetings are available for public access, in the spirit of Freedom of Information, using a static repository and the HaIRST Experimental discovery service.

The Mandate toolkit is a valuable resource for libraries wishing to manage more online digital content. It contains model workflows, metadata structures and mappings which can be developed by any institution and adapted to suit a wide range of material.

A final mention should be made of the Scottish Distributed Digital Library. This is a pilot service providing access to collections of freely available digital resources with Scottish themes. Collections range from the results of large-scale digitisation projects to high-quality resources created by amateur enthusiasts, covering a wide range of topics and formats. The service provides improved access to the content (try searching Google for 'Scottish collections'), and an easy way for libraries to augment their own digital collections. Anyone wishing to add a digital collection to the SDDL should contact SLIC or CDLR.
Gordon Dunsire, Depute Director, Centre for Digital Library Research

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Information Scotland is delivered online by the SAPIENS electronic publishing service based at the Centre for Digital Library Research. SLAINTE (Scottish libraries across the Internet) offers further information about librarianship and information management in Scotland.

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