**Core Story and User Interviews**

Design and Branding Group

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**Summary**

I interviewed two academic researchers and one research librarian. Those interviews informed my drafting of a core story for the search engine. By “core story” I mean a pithy description of what the search engine is and why it exists, something akin to an elevator pitch.

**Core Story**

The framework I’m using to propose a core story is:

1. What kind of thing is this tool?
2. What makes it unique?
3. What are the benefits to the user?
4. What’s the inspiring future?

*What kind of thing is this tool?*

* Search engine

*What makes it unique?*

* Concept level search
  + But JSTOR also doing concept search
* Returns passages instead of whole documents
  + Unlike JSTOR

*What are the benefits to the user?*

* More relevant results
* Saves time
* Discovery of non-canonical texts
* Returns passages instead of entire documents
* No more pulling keywords out of thin air

*What’s the inspiring future?*

* Powerful, efficient, and publicly-accessible search of a wide range of texts
* Licensing the tool to for-profit entities to support the public facing search
  + E.g. The New York Times using the technology to power its archives search

*Draft Core Story*

* With our search engine, you search for ideas instead of keywords. Simply upload a relevant passage of text, and the engine instantly parses it and shows you other conceptually similar, 3-page passages from the database you’ve chosen. You mark the most relevant results, rerun the search, and the engine improves the results each time. No more hunting for the magic keyword combination, and more free time to respond to those pesky admin emails.

*Tagline*

* Search ideas, not words
* Find the 10 relevant passages in 1/10 the time.
* Search smarter
* Stop hunting and start finding

*Questions*

* Is it smart to focus predominantly on academic researchers? Might it be useful to have other potential users in mind when designing the tool?

**Interviews**

*Observations about contemporary research methods*

* Using ECCO is “laborious” and “serendipitous”. It’s easier than pre-digital methods and uncovers more sources, but you know you’re not getting close to everything that’s relevant and it still takes a long time. Because of the incompleteness of the searching, it’s hard to make claims about quantity or intensity of ideas.
* ECCO feels outdated
* When doing digital research people can be overwhelmed by the number of results and the number of interfaces

*Reaction to this new search engine*

* “Game changer”
* This will improve the quality of sources; it’s not just about saving time
* People will have to think a little differently. They may have to know more about their topic to get started, and they’ll have to work on the words that build the concept instead of just describing the thing they’re looking for

*Predictions about reception among colleagues*

* Very positive
* Almost everyone is now comfortable with using digital, but the raw data aspect – the CSV file – could intimidate a lot of people

*Themes*

* Google is changing the way we think about search
* Keyword searching can be painful
* People mostly won’t understand the details of how concept searching works

*Questions*

* Will academic researchers react negatively to research being made “easier”? That way of describing it might feel devaluing.
* Should the raw data-type functionality be generally hidden and intended for power users? The main interface could present a basic search function, where you upload a single passage, mark results as relevant, and iterate. The point would be to create a very straightforward and friendly initial experience.
* Will the tool remember your past research?