Excerpt of Organization of Information - System Review

Materials of the System

As NC Cardinal is a consortia of thirty-six public libraries and institutions throughout North Carolina, the materials featured within the system vary from library to library. Per the NC Cardinal information page, there are 34 public library systems (1 special library), 115 library branch locations, and 6.5 million materials within circulation (NC Cardinal, n.d). In order to determine the scope with types of materials, I performed an exploratory title search using a general title that can be found in most libraries: Hamlet. Rather than going to a specific library website, I went directly to the NC Cardinal website which allows users to search every library within the consortium from a single page. Search results displayed a number of materials within the system with the word "Hamlet" in the title. These materials included books, CD audiobooks, DVDs, and cassette audiobooks. While these formats were viewable, unfortunately, there is not an option to sort by format (which will be explored further in the "Retrieval Methods" section). Records displayed within search results consist of holdings within each of the thirty-five member libraries, associated works, derivative works, and other volumes and related materials pertaining to the material searched. Materials can be selected for review and saved for later review by utilizing the "Add to My List" function within the results (this will also be explored further in the "Retrieval Methods" section).

Retrieval Methods

The appearance of the screen in which a user does the initial NC Cardinal materials search depends on how a user accesses the catalog. Some public library system websites display a single search box on their main landing page that connects to the NC Cardinal system (such as McDowell County Public Library) and others contain a link to access the catalog that then redirects users to the NC Cardinal website (such as Caldwell County Public Library). For users who access NC Cardinal directly, the presentation of the search interface is quite simple and accessible. Upon landing on the NC Cardinal website you are greeted by a mostly white screen featuring green accents on a rectangular gradient with the NC Cardinal logo featured prominently in the center of the page. Located under the smaller logo on the top left of the page is a black bar featuring access to "home," "help," "NC Live," and "NC Kids Digital" links, and on the top right is a link for NC Cardinal library consortia participants to log in with their library card number (those needing to request a library card can do so at the bottom of the page).

The "search the catalog" box is located above the larger logo and under options for "advanced search" and "browse the catalog," and next to the box are drop-down menu options to search by type, format, and library. The basic search allows you to search by keyword, title, author, subject, and series. Next to the "search" link is an "all libraries" link, but this takes users to the same results as just selecting "NC Cardinal" from the library drop-down menu. When you select the "advanced search" option you are led to a screen featuring three tabs: "advanced search," "numeric search," and "expert search." The advanced search screen "search input" section allows users to search multiple access points with drop-down menus such as keyword, title, and author with and/or Boolean operators located to the side. Users can narrow their focus by item type, item form, language, audience, video format, bib level, literary form, and shelving location, library system, and publication year under the "search filters" section. An unfortunate design flaw in the advanced search page is that the actual search button is between the two sections which is slightly confusing as a user. The Numeric Search allows users to search by ISBN, call number, MARC tag 035, LCCN, TCN, and Item Barcode and then narrow by library. The Expert

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Search screen appears to be a way to search by MARC record tags, subfields, and values, and appears to be mainly for library staff or library users who like a challenge.

Once you arrive on the search results page (which, as someone who has used multiple types of library catalogs, has quite a large font which is quite welcome) the primary body of the page focuses on your results in a list format. To the top and left sides of the page are further search options such as perform another search, advanced search, sort by, show fewer details, limit to available items, group formats and editions, show results from all libraries, and exclude electronic resources. The left sidebar features the ability to narrow by access points by personal author, corporate author, topic subject, genre, series title, name subject, geographic subject (with each access point listed in descending order by number of appearances). As noted, there are two help links at the top of the page and bottom of the page for users who may be having trouble at this point, but it should be noted that the tutorial uses some outdated screencaps and information (however, it is still mostly accurate and helpful to a user).

When clicking into a record, the page displays information in order of what is important to a user to what is mainly necessary for library staff needs. The top of the page lists the title, author, format, available copies, and number of current holds on the item. Since NC Cardinal is a consortium, the catalog lists available items as "x of x copies available at NC Cardinal" which is slightly confusing language, but "NC Cardinal" is simply a placeholder without having to list multiple libraries. Further clarification for holdings information and locations is listed down the page under "Location" (this is where call number information can also be found), and the design of this section emphasizes that this is an important section by placing the information on a bar that is different in shape and color than the rest of the page. Within the record is the option to view other formats and editions, record details (this is where the ISBN is located, which is the second most helpful bit of metadata as a user), content descriptions, and search for related items by subject. There are further expandable sections such as summaries, awards and reviews, Shelf Browser, and the MARC record. The Shelf Browser feature is quite useful as it allows users to casually browse materials (as if they were in the library) with call numbers approximate to the record selected. The records page also provides direct access to services most employed by users within a catalog such as the ability to place holds, and houses the "Add to My List" feature which enables users to log into their account and save records for later review, comparisons, or to place holds at a later time. The catalog allows users to click their browser's back button to return to results, but for users who may have some hesitation about that there is a "search results" link with an arrow above the record.