iDiscover: Examining the user experience

The Futurelib iDiscover project focused on the user experience of the iDiscover platform, the University of Cambridge interface for the Ex Libris Primo Discovery and Delivery service. The project employed UX research techniques, with a focus on observing people using iDiscover as well as talking to them about their experiences of the platform, and the place it had within their wider lives studying, conducting research and teaching at the University.

Methodology

- Close observation with people using iDiscover, with a focus on micro- and macro-level issues, i.e. how people interpreted and approached iDiscover, as well as the finer details of how aspects of the user interface were used and understood.
- Semi-structured interviews with Cambridge students and academic staff, focusing on the ways in which they approached finding information resources, in and outside of the iDiscover platform.
- Activity-based workshops conducted with students, exploring approaches to information-seeking, the tools people used to search for resources and student experiences of iDiscover.

Findings

- People use a number of different search tools and platforms for different purposes and at different stages in their work.
- The level of simplicity of a search interface informs approaches to searching.
- The perceived complexity of a search directly affects user expectations.
- There is an expectation that iDiscover will primarily search for resources and content held by, or accessible through, the University of Cambridge.
- iDiscover is used by many people primarily to conduct known-item searches.
- Quick and seamless access to resources is a high priority for people using iDiscover and similar search tools.
- Relevant results are key to a successful user experience.

Project outputs

Outputs of the project included: recommendations for the reconfiguration of aspects of the iDiscover interface and for its ongoing development; documentation for Ex Libris, the supplier of the underlying Primo service; user personas to be referred to as local development work continues; educational tools for library staff to use when working with people using iDiscover.

Outcomes of the research

The project findings and resulting recommendations have enabled immediate, positive changes to the iDiscover interface. They provide an evidence base which can be used to inform decisions around the development and configuration of the platform. The suppliers, Ex Libris, have expressed interest in the project. We hope that the findings will also prove valuable to other research-intensive institutions who are considering implementing similar discovery systems.