

New OCLC FirstSearch to Provide Integrated, Enhanced Reference Service

By James Speed Hensinger

BCR member libraries are urged to take a look at OCLC's New FirstSearch service when it becomes available. OCLC has scheduled the full release in August. The new service will help users find and access information more quickly and easily.

New FirstSearch is a redesign of the existing OCLC FirstSearch online service, integrating features and content of OCLC Electronic Collections Online into a single, comprehensive reference service. It also incorporates enhanced functionality familiar to users of the OCLC EPIC service.

In this next generation FirstSearch, libraries will find a rich collection of databases with links to the World Wide Web, online full-text services, document delivery, library holdings and interlibrary loan. New features and functions will help libraries better manage their collections, while making reference information readily available to patrons at an affordable cost. Users will be provided with seamless electronic access to bibliographic, abstract and full-text information.

Users of the New FirstSearch will have access to more than 75 databases with more than 1.5 million full-text articles. That's in addition to the more than 1,800 electronic journal titles from Electronic Collections Online expected to be available this year.

New FirstSearch:

- Integrates physical and electronic library holdings, merging them with other databases on the service.
- Brings local library or group holdings to the forefront of search results.
- Can be customized to meet the individual library's needs.
- Puts librarians in control by providing a greatly enhanced web-based Administrative Module with more options.
- Can be fully integrated through Z39.50.

The New FirstSearch's searching capabilities also will be enhanced.

- Searching results include library holdings.
- Searches can be limited to resources held in the user's own library.
- Users will be able to search in three modes Basic, Advanced or Expert.
- Search results will be sorted and relevance ranked.
- Truncation and wild cards can be used in searching.
- Searching will be Thesaurus aided.

New FirstSearch also will have a new, flexible interface. The new service will employ SiteSearch 4.0 technology, which is entirely Java-based, providing users the flexibility of adding and changing features.

Although the full version of the New FirstSearch is scheduled to be released in August, a beta version of the interface should be available in mid-April so librarians can become familiar with the new service. Most of the new administrative module may be available for the beta version, as well. Once the beta version is ready, librarians can access it at the URL: newfirstsearch.oclc.org. The FIRSTSEARCH-L electronic mail list is the best source for regular updates on the progress of New FirstSearch. Subscribe to it on the OCLC web site at www.oclc.org/oclc/forms/listserv.htm. A New FirstSearch page also is available at www.oclc.org/oclc/menu/fs_new.htm.

