

More Services at the Singapore Polytechnic Library

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Abstract

“More Services” is an add-on service offered by the Singapore Polytechnic Library in their online public access catalogue (OPAC). With this service users can request for transfer of items between the two libraries and also suggest that the library add more copies, withdraw outdated books, or buy new editions. It also provides floor location information for every title that the user finds in the catalogue. These enhancements provide our users with flexibility and convenience. This has resulted in greater customer satisfaction.

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Introduction

The Singapore Polytechnic (SP) Library had introduced Encore, a resource discovery platform which leverages on Web 2.0 technologies such as faceted browsing, tag clouds, relevance ranking. These features allow users to narrow their search results easily. The Library wanted to address the rapidly changing needs and expectations of users, and explored creating additional features for a more user-centric OPAC.

The University of Sheffield identified some new features for library catalogues through a case study. Tam (2009) found that:

“All interviewees liked the possibility that the catalogue might show the availability and the location of the book, including the floor number, on the initial results list. All of them stated that such features would be useful and could save time.”

“The displays of the availability and the location of books are also quite popular: five interviewees liked this feature the most.”

Mi and Weng (2007) made the following recommendations:

“Academic libraries should aim toward designing a user-centered, self-sufficient, twenty-first century online catalog that fits the Web 2.0 model. The ultimate goal is that users will be comfortable and confident using library OPACs for their information needs wherever a computer is available and without special training.”

“The future of academic libraries relies on effective OPACs. This is one of the most pressing tasks that must be accomplished.”

In line with the above findings, SP Library worked to further strengthen the usability of its OPAC. SP Library wanted to empower its users by providing easy access to value-added services. The “More Services” option in OPAC was introduced and it offered the following services:

- Request to pick up available items for collection at any of the two SP libraries
- Suggest to SP library to add more copies, withdraw outdated books, or buy new editions
- Recommend the title to a friend
- Read/write reviews on the title
- Report the loss of a library item
- Identify the location of a library item including the floor number

Figure 1: SP Library Catalogue with “More Services”

[Starting out with Visual Basic 2008](#)
 Gaddis, Tony.
 Boston : Pearson Addison Wesley, c2009.



LOCATION	CALL NO	STATUS
Main Lending (Level 4)	QA76.73.B3 Gad	AVAILABLE >> More Services
Main Lending (Loans Counter)	QA76.73.B3 Gad CD-ROM	AVAILABLE >> More Services
Main Lending (Loans Counter)	QA76.73.B3 Gad DVD	AVAILABLE >> More Services

c2009 

This suite of new services empowers the users to take action on the items retrieved from the OPAC. Besides providing convenience at the touch of a button, this innovation also saved the time of both users and library staff. Users need not copy the information retrieved from the OPAC and use another application like email to send it to the library or their friends. Library staff need not spend time to check requests from the users as all requests contain full bibliographic information from the record in the OPAC.

Planning

When planning for “More Services”, usability and user-friendliness were the key considerations for the Library. For usability, the ability of the system to offer the relevant e-services based on the results, was vital. The system has to display the appropriate e-form based on the context of the search results. There was also great effort taken to ensure that the solution is user-friendly so

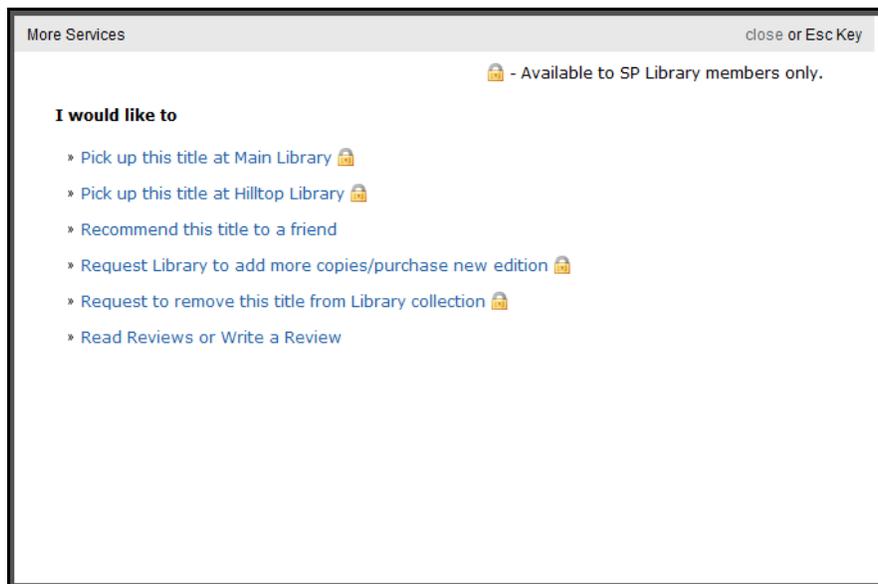
that a request for service requires minimal data entry. The solution should also avoid any changes to the library management system.

Implementation

The “More Services” link was introduced into the Web OPAC pages by using a JavaScript file. The user-friendly script was written to provide the solution in the client browser. This was a neat solution which did not require any modification to the library management system. A simple routing workflow web form was incorporated using Microsoft .NET platform and SQL Server.

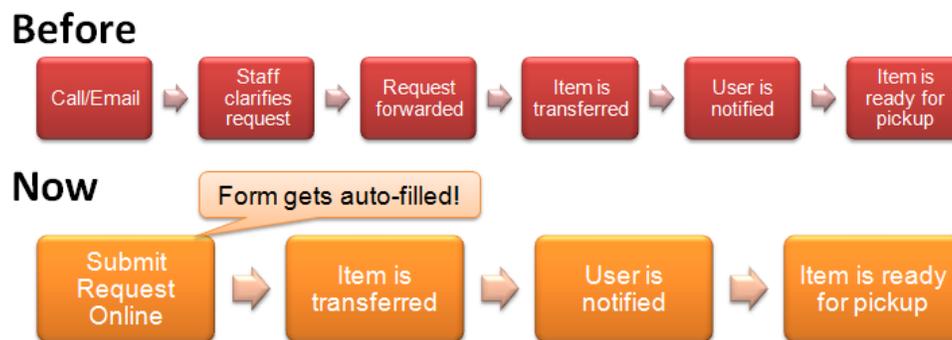
When an option is selected, the appropriate form is displayed to the user (see Figure 2). The title details like Title, Location, Call No. is automatically populated into the form with a Submit button. The user details are also obtained from the user database after authentication. When the user submits the request, an email is triggered to the mailbox of the respective staff or to the library mailbox.

Figure 2: More services listed based on the “Available” status



The following three scenarios explained the detailed implementation process for the various services offered in “More Services”.

Figure 3: Scenario I where User wishes to borrow a book from Hilltop Library at Main Library

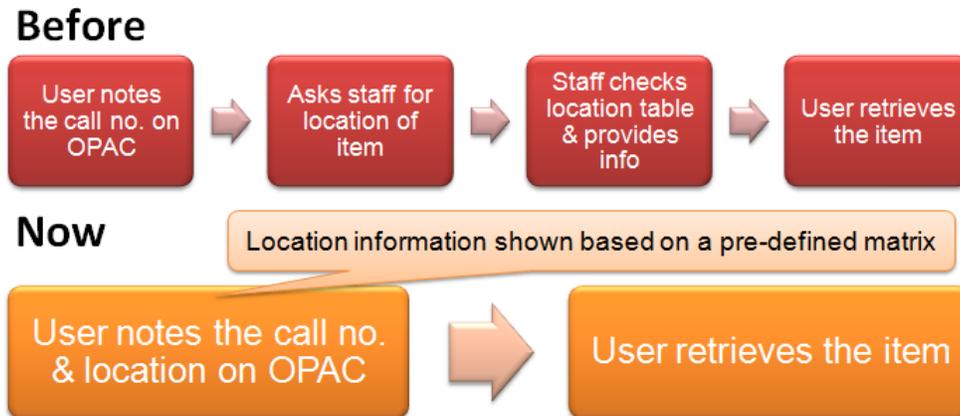


Before “More Services” were implemented, users had to call the library to request for transfer of an item or email the requested title to the library. The library staff had to call the user if any clarification was needed. More often than not, the user sent only the title without any other information. After clarification, the request was forwarded to another staff to retrieve the item from the shelf. When the item is retrieved, a reservation was placed and the user was notified to collect the item (see Figure 3).

After implementing “More Services”, this process was simplified. When the user submits the request online from the OPAC, the record details are taken automatically with an email triggered to the library staff for further action. Since all the details are taken from the web OPAC, no time is wasted to seek clarifications from the user.

Similar implementations were made for other services like “Suggest to library to add more copies, withdraw outdated books, buy new editions, etc.”

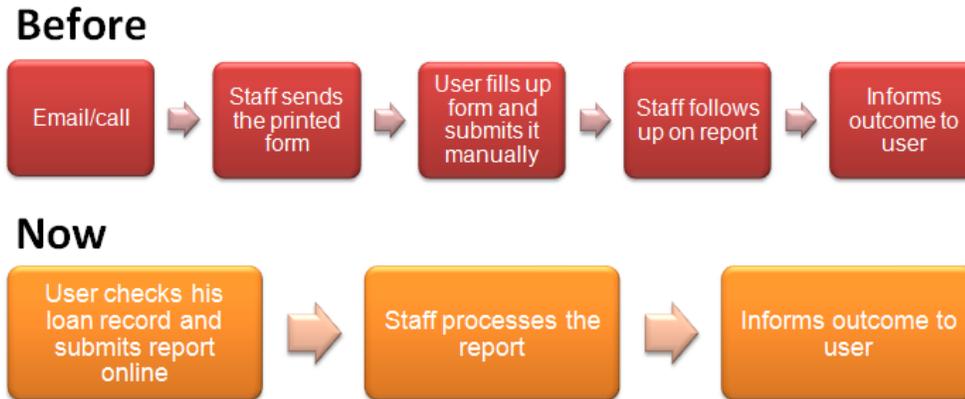
Figure 4: Scenario 2 where User wishes to retrieve a book



Before the implementation of “More Services”, users had to refer to the location table to find out the floor location for lending books at the Main Library. If they were unable to locate the item, they asked the staff at the counter for help. Library Staff checked the location table, informed the user who then went to find the item on the shelves (see Figure 4).

After the implementation of “More Services”, users can easily see the floor information in the brief and full catalogue record. A matrix of the call number ranges of the collection by floor is maintained in the web server to provide the specific location for each title. By providing the information upfront, it enhances the usability of the system and helps the user to locate the item.

Figure 5: Scenario 3 where User wishes to report loss of book



Before the implementation of “More Services”, users had to call or email the library to report the loss of items. Users needed to fill up the Report Lost Items Form and submit it to Library staff for further action. Users often had to logon to their library record to get the details of the lost item in order to fill up the form. Library staff then followed up on the report and informed the user of the outcome (see Figure 5). This process in reporting lost items took up too much time and effort on the part of the user.

After the implementation of “More Services”, users can submit the Report Lost Item Form online from their loan record, instead of having to make a report at the library counter. Upon receiving the e-form, the staff processes the request and then informs the user of the outcome.

Enhancements

After the successful implementation of “More Services”, further enhancements are in progress:

1. “Add title to my module”

This provides an option for lecturers to choose any title from the catalogue and request the library to add it to their modules. This would help the students to identify those titles that are recommended by their lecturers.

2. “Request on behalf” for library staff

This provides an option for the library staff to enter the request received through email / telephone on the behalf of the user.

3. Show exact shelf position with the floor plan

In addition to the floor location information, the exact shelf position will be shown with the floor plan for every title searched from the catalogue.

4. Implement “More Services” in Encore

To implement the service in the latest web 2.0 catalogue.

Conclusion

In implementing “More Services” we achieved our objectives of empowering and enabling users to request for services, enhancing the usability of the system and resolving operational issues in processing requests. By giving several options to request for services online, a convenient one-stop service for library users from the catalogue is now a reality. More importantly, they have given our users flexibility and convenience when using our library services. This has resulted in greater customer satisfaction.

References

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