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LibX-A Browser Plug-in for Libraries

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### Abstract

A growing concern for libraries is that of staying current in today's changing digital environment. As technology continues to change, libraries must find new techniques and tools to provide valid access to the information contained within the physical walls. LibX is an open source tool that will help libraries stay valid to users by providing a search bar plug-in that is downloadable and allows patrons to access catalog information from anywhere on the internet, much like having a Google search bar. LibX is a growing technology that will help libraries stay relevant, influential and accessible.

## LibX-A Browser Plug-in for Libraries

### *Introduction*

As technology advances, so must libraries to stay valid in the market of information. One new technology is helping libraries by allowing the creation of individual search boxes, called editions, to be installed by users onto their web browsers. LibX is an open source plug-in that will bring library catalogs to the users of internet, and subsequently make libraries and their catalogs relevant in today's changing technology environment. This paper will examine how LibX pertains to the future of libraries by discussing its relevance, influence and ease of access for library materials. Real world applications for this emerging technology trend will also be discussed.

### *Description*

LibX is one technology that can help librarians promote their library's collection. LibX is an open source resource in which users can access their library's collection by linking into the Online Public Access Catalog (OPAC) as an extension for the Mozilla Firefox and Internet Explorer (IE) browsers. This connection between patrons and libraries ensures delivery of library information in three different ways from whatever webpage the patron is viewing as described by Bailey and Back (2006): by a toolbar located on the patron's browser, a right click menu for quick searches, or using links inserted into the web pages the patron has browsed, such as Amazon, or Google (p. 291).

LibX was created by Annette Bailey and Godmar Back, while at Virginia Tech University, using input from the school's librarians and the Department of Computer Science in a joint endeavor. Currently, according to [www.libx.org](http://www.libx.org)(2009), 633 public and academic libraries have created a browser plug-in edition specific to their catalog (n.p.). These editions are listed in

alphabetical order on the LibX website, and are a straightforward method to see if your local library participates in this open source item.

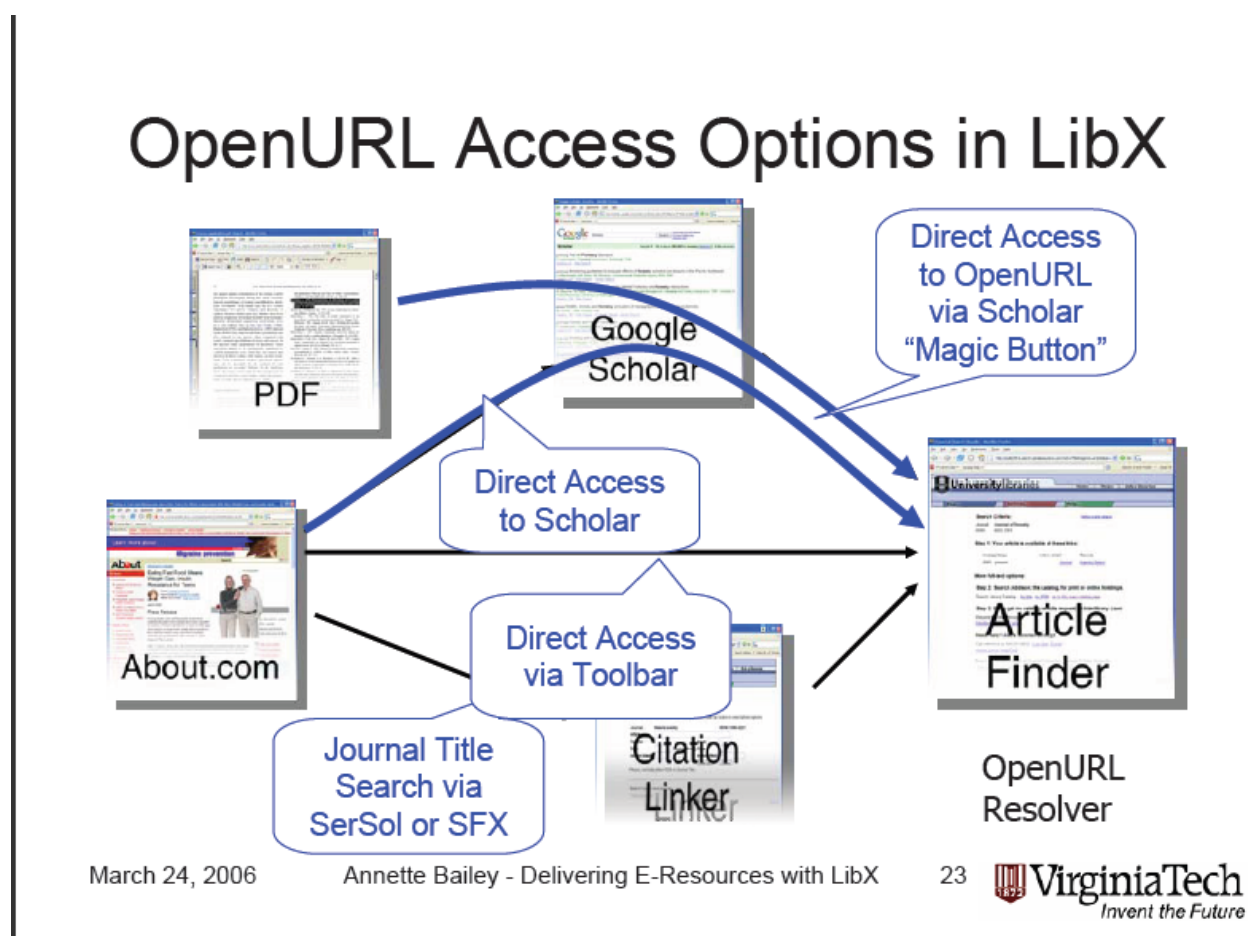
LibX was created in 2005. By the end of 2007, over 256 libraries had employed LibX to create a customizable edition specifically for their collection, which gave patrons the ability to have direct access to their resources. Bailey and Back also won the LITA/Brett Butler Entrepreneurship Award in 2007. Now in 2009, one reason why LibX is just becoming widespread is that while there has been a plug-in available for the open source internet browser Firefox for some time, LibX has recently released a version for Microsoft's IE browsers 6 and 7, which is generally used more by patrons (even though it is not open source).

LibX was created as a response by Bailey because many librarians were apprehensive about patrons using the internet to research. As Bailey (2008) states, it was time to "put the library back in the picture" and LibX creates a "virtual librarian that guides users to library resources while they use the web" (p. 2). Libraries were considered to be rather archaic and many librarians felt technology was increasingly replacing their role as information professionals. Library content can now be more accessible by the patron that wants their information free from search engines like Google while involving the library in a high-tech way. LibX brings the library catalog straight to the user without having to be logged in to the library website, thus "putting the library back in the picture".

LibX works by providing support for a variety of features. As mentioned above, LibX incorporates a library search box, a right click menu, and access to information on web pages to see if the library has a similar title. As stated by [www.libx.org](http://www.libx.org) (2009), "LibX supports Millennium, Voyager, Aleph, Sirsi, Dynix/IPAC, Serials Solutions E-Journals and Central Search, SFX, and Sirsi Web2" (n.p.). LibX also supports OpenURL which contains metadata or

identifiers about an object and are often called “Article Finders”, Google Scholar with selected text searching, and uses embedded clues for website searching on multiple book buying sites. LibX also uses auto linking to other identifiers in the catalogs such as ISBNs, provides off-campus access, and supports CiteULike which imports bibliographic information LibX additionally uses COinS that can turn hidden tags into working links, and correlates with xISBN in which a list of related ISBNs is returned upon searching. ([www.libx.org](http://www.libx.org), 2009). WorldCat is the developer of xISBN, also an emerging technology, which is available at no charge.

This picture is a screenshot of a diagram from Annette Bailey’s (2006) presentation, “Delivering E-Resources with LibX” (p. 23) of how OpenURL is incorporated into LibX.



LibX is available worldwide with library editions in Australia, Canada, Puerto Rico, Spain and England already using this open source item, just to name a few examples. Most libraries utilizing this resource are academic, which include universities and community colleges, but there are also a large number of public libraries. Special libraries such as the Army War College and the Mennonite Biblical Seminary also have a LibX edition. These editions are specific to each library and its catalog, which is one reason why LibX is such a pertinent technology, because it is adaptable.

### *Impact on Libraries*

LibX currently impacts libraries by creating relevance for libraries in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The internet is browsed by millions around the world each day, with individuals visiting websites such as Wikipedia and Google to find information pertinent to the topic they are researching. These websites should not be automatically trusted to have the correct information because they are not peer-reviewed journals, from within an academic setting. Wikipedia, for example, can be written by anyone who has the internet. It then becomes questionable that we should believe what these individuals have to say. Also, individuals are purchasing more items online, with technology's help, from websites such as Amazon. With LibX, libraries can remain current by giving patrons the choice to borrow useful and trusted information from their local library or pay money for something they might not want to keep.

LibX also influences the library world's future users, both in academic and public settings. With today's technology, children are being taught at an earlier age to do online searching and, in general, how to use computers. Children can now develop their research skills while being exposed to the ideas that libraries do exist and the information in them is valid, organized, and important just by having a library's LibX browser plug-in added to their search

engine. LibX could literally change an entire generation's search habits, and this pattern could follow far into the future.

LibX also creates an impact on libraries today, and in the future, by providing easy access to information in library catalogs for users. With some typing and a click of a button, users can be directed to resources located in their local library. Because a user does not need to be actually at the library's website, using LibX allows the individual to take their library with them while completing searches. Another example of easy access to information by LibX is the visually embedded cues it employs. LibX permits the library's resources to be prominently linked to popular websites and the items individuals are viewing, thus providing patrons access to library materials they might not have been aware of previously. Below is a screenshot of an example, courtesy of Longwood University (2009), of an embedded cue at Barnes & Noble's website, which illustrates how these cues work and how they appear (n.p.).

The screenshot shows the Barnes & Noble website interface. At the top, the browser address bar displays the URL: <http://search.barnesandnoble.com/booksearch/isbninquiry.asp?z=y&EAN=9780374292798&tm=1>. The website header includes the Barnes & Noble logo, navigation links (HOME, BOOKS, USED & OUT OF PRINT, TEXTBOOKS, DVD, MUSIC, PC & VIDEO GAMES, B&N JR., TOYS & GAMES, HOME & OFFICE, GIFT CARDS, MEMBERSHIP & CREDIT CARD, BOOK CLUBS), and a search bar. A banner below the header reads "Members Save Up To 40% Every Day." The main content area features the book "The World Is Flat [Updated and Expanded]: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century" by Thomas L. Friedman. The book's cover is displayed on the left. To the right of the cover, the book's details are listed: "Hardcover - Updated and Expanded Edition", ISBN: 0374292795, Pub. Date: April 2006, Sales Rank: 257, and Customer Rating: 4.5 stars. The "BUY IT NEW" section shows a list price of \$30.00, an online price of \$21.00 (Save 30%), and a members price of \$18.90. A "FAST & FREE DELIVERY" badge is prominently displayed, indicating that the item is eligible for this service. A red arrow points to the "FAST & FREE DELIVERY" badge, highlighting the embedded cue. Below the "BUY IT NEW" section, there is a "BUY IT USED" section and a "FIND IT IN OUR STORES" section with a zip code input field and a "FIND" button.

*Problems or Concerns*

The LibX browser plug-in is an open source technology, but has very little problems for users to run on their search engines. There is a “Known Issues” tab on the left side of the LibX website at [www.libx.org](http://www.libx.org) to reference, but the list is fairly short, having mostly to do with the auto linking feature. There is also the possibility of contracting spyware by downloading the plug-in, but that too seems to be a non-issue, since it was not mentioned on the library blogs.

A concern for LibX is that it does not operate with the lesser used search engines, such as Safari and Opera. Chrome is a new search engine powered by Google that LibX does not work with yet, another example of LibX not being widespread. There has been some talk through the LibX mailing list (2009) as recently as July 13, 2009, of Google deciding to support add-ons for Chrome, but that the system is still being developed and is not ready (n.p.).

An additional concern for patrons is LibX does have some oddities in the way it operates. One example of this is in its auto linking option, where certain types of numbers are hot linked incorrectly because they appear to LibX as an International Standard Book Number (ISBN). These numbers are automatically highlighted to be searched, but they have no significant value to the item. Greenhill (2009) also discusses auto linking in her screencast in which she cautions the user about going in “circles” while using hot linked ISBNs as the only source for searching (n.p.).

One problem to consider is how librarians are to promote LibX to patrons for use. While librarians can make LibX available for use on their websites, compelling students or patrons to utilize the tool is problematic. Most information seekers want the easiest method to search, and working with Google fits their need. To fully institute LibX as a feature comparable to Google



in the minds of patrons, librarians have to supply the access to and information about LibX via the library website, blogs, or other forms of communication and promotion.

### *Solutions*

For LibX to be fully integrated into the library world, the plug-in will have to work with all search engines. As technology continues to advance, LibX will have to stay current and updated to sustain usage by patrons. Supporting all current and future web browsers and search engines is imperative for LibX, especially since the plug-in was created in 2005 and is just now an emerging trend since moving to support IE in early 2009.

LibX might overcome the auto linking issues by furthering their research. Virginia Tech receives funding through grants, which in turn support the computer department's research. Using these grants, LibX must troubleshoot potential problems, and what areas need work currently. LibX does seem to have an excellent response system through its mailing list for questions from librarians about whatever glitch they might be experiencing. This is a point worth mentioning because it is important to listen to the individuals who are utilizing the product, provide support, and fix the problems for LibX to continue to impact the library world.

LibX could also find a solution to the problem of getting more people to use the plug-in by minimizing the amount of technical and library jargon that is used to promote it. For a librarian who does not have the support of, or access to, an information technology (IT) department, the jargon can be intimidating. While the process for creating a customized edition of the plug-in should be uncomplicated, a librarian with limited experience in computer related work might find jargon like xISBN and OpenURL resolvers too advanced. This same concept applies to students intimidated by library jargon. The idea is to entice individuals to utilize the

plug-in, which can be done by using language that will clarify understanding of the technology used.

### *Real-life Application*

LibX is becoming more than just an emerging technology. As stated above, there are more than 600 libraries around the world using this technology, with more creating their own editions every day. Several university libraries in Kansas have a LibX edition, including Baker University and the University of Kansas. However, Hale Library at Kansas State University has offered LibX since August 2007, and the librarians have since spread the word about the plug-in by blogging and posting information about LibX in the Cool Tools section.

These three university libraries are introducing LibX to their students and encouraging them to use this plug-in for searching their catalogs. LibX is a useful real-life tool for these libraries as it creates an interaction between users and the catalogs by using technologies that are similar to the search methods they are currently employing. LibX helps to strengthen these learning communities and helps libraries adapt to a changing technology environment.

### *Conclusion*

LibX is an exciting new tool that is open source and has been updated to support Microsoft's IE, which will help to encompass many more users. As more libraries incorporate this plug-in into their websites, and more patrons start to use it, LibX will grow to be a large asset. LibX is one tool to help libraries remain relevant, create influence, and have easy access to catalog information. In doing this, libraries can remain flexible and adaptable for future technologies.

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