

SEARCHit™ a Robust Federated Search Application

CASE STUDY



The University of Alabama in Huntsville Implements SuperSearch, Powered by Auto-Graphics' SEARCHit™ Robust Federated Search Solution

Challenge:

The M. Louis Salmon Library at The University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH) is housed in a 105,000 square foot facility which includes a state-of-the-art high-tech wing with an Information Arcade, five computer labs supporting over 250 workstations including: a math tutorial lab, a liberal arts lab, a nursing lab, and two Library distance learning labs. The library is led by Dr. Wilson Luquire, Dean of the Library, and is supported by an experienced team of 10 accredited MLS professionals, two Ph.D.s and five full-time information systems staff.

The Library supports all the academic and research programs at UAH, and presides over and manages a significant annual investment in electronic resources for a university library of its size. Its collection includes more than 325,000 print volumes, 500,000 United States government publications, and 600,000 materials in microform and manuscript format. In addition to books and microform materials, the Library offers a broad selection of books, journals, newspapers and other serials in electronic form. Approximately 52,000 electronic periodicals (of which over 20,000 are unique titles), over 48,000 electronic books and over 350 subscription based content databases can be accessed both on and off campus via the Library website. All materials and services in the UAH library are available without charge to UAH faculty members and students.

In 2004 Dr. Luquire began assessing whether the significant investment that the Library has made each year in electronic resources was being fully maximized. Through analyzing the library usage statistics, he learned that a very small percentage of library users were consulting library experts, the M. Louis Salmon Library team, when conducting a search of available assets. Dr. Luquire wanted to find a solution that would allow faculty members and students access to the Library's resources 24 x 7 through a reliable and intuitive interface. Based on that initiative, Dr. Luquire's team conducted a review of the various federated search products available, and included Auto-Graphics' powerful federated search solution, SEARCHit™, in the competitive analysis.

Solution:

After a rigorous evaluation process of several leading federated search products, the M. Louis Salmon Library selected Auto-Graphics' SEARCHit as its federated search solution. The M. Louis Salmon library deployed SEARCHit through a UAH-

branded library web portal named SuperSearch.

SEARCHit was selected due to the highly customizable and intuitive interface that allows the UAH library staff to configure and guide use of its electronic resources through pre-determined category-based search options. By selecting SEARCHit the UAH library staff would now have the ability to help users avoid information overload through intelligent results management that limits the number of search hits per database. The federated search implementation would now allow for results to be quickly returned and displayed in a consistent, standardized format improving the ability for UAH faculty members and students to find relevant information to assist with their research activities.

The UAH team customized the SEARCHit interface by grouping electronic resources according to subject matter, greatly improving the speed and quality of information discovery. Not only does the SuperSearch portal improve access to the library's most popular databases, it identifies and promotes use of more obscure, subject-specific databases that users may overlook, thereby maximizing the University's substantial investment in electronic content.

"I remember when cutting edge with respect to library automation was to have the entire library collection on ultra fiche in one filing cabinet in your office," joked Dr. Luquire. "From those early days to the latest technologies in library automation, I have seen remarkable developments. The privilege that UAH has had working with Auto-Graphics is unprecedented in terms of both the quality of its products and its customer service. From start to finish UAH brought up some 100+ full-text databases in about three or four months through the SEARCHit portal option."

After an initial pilot program, SuperSearch was integrated with EBSCO's LinkSource OpenURL resolver on the University's servers and publicized to the students, faculty and staff. To that end, the Library launched a comprehensive university-wide education and awareness campaign, placing the SuperSearch logo on the Library home page and promoting the federated search capability throughout the Library and computer labs via monitor labels and screen savers on the 50 computers.

"SuperSearch is a wonderful way of highlighting our available resources. It helps students discover articles that they would never have found otherwise," said Chad Haeefele, new MLS graduate from the University of Pittsburgh, Reference Desk Coordinator and Co-Coordinator of Instruction at UAH. "Compared with other federated search products that I've seen, SEARCHit is more intuitive, responsive, and useful."

Next, the Library staff revised the entire Library Instruction program templates and guides to reflect SuperSearch. As for the rest of campus, Subject Librarians arranged product demonstration sessions for each college's faculty and students. The Library also sponsored a "Fall Frolic" event, conducting 15-minute training sessions over a 2-hour period. This university event also included a catered buffet and free hot air balloon rides.

"We now present SuperSearch in every library instruction session we hold here at UAH. Students are very interested when they hear it can help them save time and conduct their research more efficiently. I believe the user-friendly interface makes the task of doing library research a little less daunting, especially to new students," said Sarah Garrett, new MLS graduate

from the University of Arizona and Co-Coordinator of Instruction at UAH.

Results:

Since its deployment SuperSearch, powered by Auto-Graphics' SEARCHit, has met all the initial goals set forth by Dr. Luquire and the M. Louis Salmon Library for federated searching. The library has seen a 51.1% increase in the number of log-ins from the previous year and the solution has proven to be completely compatible with all of UAH's electronic resources, including free and subscription-based databases, library catalogs, Z39.50 targets, proprietary content repositories, and the open Web. The library staff has also realized some additional and unexpected benefits.

"SEARCHit has helped us to better understand our content investment," said UAH Technology Librarian Annette Parrish. "As one of the Library's content experts, our team works to develop the category-based search options that our faculty and students use to perform their research, grouping databases into broad categories like business or science. Using SuperSearch on a daily basis, we've been pleased to uncover a wealth of knowledge in our existing content investment, identifying obscure content resources that we would not have thought to recommend to our students for a particular research subject. Learning more about our databases allows us to guide researchers towards the most current and relevant information."

"In comparison to other electronic resources, SEARCHit has proven to be a considerable time-saver for students, as well as an essential tool in targeting the most relevant resources for a particular subject," commented David Moore, Assistant to the Dean and Electronic Resources Librarian and Business Subject Specialist.

UAH continues to work very aggressively and positively on a variety of new implementations with Auto-Graphics today. The University has been so pleased with the SEARCHit implementation that it is employing the Auto-Graphics user interface as the front end not only for patrons wishing to conduct federated searches across all the Library's holdings, but also for all interlibrary loan (ILL) transactions that are fulfilled by OCLC. Auto-Graphics is one of the few library automation vendors that offers both an ISO-compliant ILL product, SHAREit™, in addition to its federated search product, SEARCHit. And, Auto-Graphics has the only ILL product, which enables seamless "Open ILL" transactions, linking to 3rd party ILL management systems such as OCLC or from 3rd parties to the Library Management Platform ILL manager.

"Auto-Graphics has been nothing less than remarkable in terms of product dependability and its response and service to us as a client," remarked Dr. Luquire. "Research that may have taken more than an hour to manually search multiple databases one at a time, can now be condensed to less than a few minutes, simply by utilizing the federated search capabilities inherent in SEARCHit. I don't remember any system downtime in the past year, short of a power or network failure, and I recommend Auto-Graphics without reservation."

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