

Digital Literacy and Discovery

How leveraging a discovery service can help patrons build their digital literacy skills.



Public libraries have been given a huge task to educate their patrons and teach the foundations of digital literacy. Incredible resources and non-profits have been developed (like digitallearn.org) to ease the burden off of librarians and connect patrons to the right information around digital literacy. With the rise of fake news, user privacy regulations and the growth of a digital world (post-pandemic), patrons are navigating an even more complex digital world and need tools and resources to match the depth in which they experience the digital.



The good news in this is that public libraries are experiencing some upward trends as a result of this shift. According to a study conducted by WordsRated (a non-commercial, international research data and analytics group), US-based public libraries are more popular because of the shift to digital:



More registered borrowers than ever (174.23 million, or 53.57% of population)



Total library collection size is larger and more digital than ever (58.75% of collection)



Library collection use is higher and more digital than ever (37.39% of all collection use)

This playbook looks at some of the challenges that public libraries face today when it comes to engaging their patrons digitally, and how leveraging a discovery service can improve this effort.

The Digital Divide: Digital Natives vs. Immigrants

Your library caters to a diverse group of patrons with unique digital skills. “Digital natives”¹ are people who were “born into and raised in a digital world,”² whereas “digital immigrants”¹ come to it later in life. **Digital natives are accustomed to the “instantaneity”¹ of commercial platforms that easily allow them to search, choose and obtain whatever they want to find.** They expect functionalities like a single search box that autofills what they are looking for as they type, offers product suggestions and allows them to save liked items for later. They also expect around-the-clock access via mobile platforms. This group **reflexively goes to the open web** when they need information.³

Digital immigrants, however, might find internet technology to be “alien and unintuitive”³ and therefore may be intimidated by the library’s digital systems. They might have trouble “navigating”⁴ the technology as they aren’t sure where to look or what to click. They need something that guides them through the steps they need to take.

Tendencies and Preferences of Digital Natives Versus Digital Immigrants^{1,2,3,4,5}

Digital Natives

- ✓ Accustomed to multitasking
- ✓ Like random access
- ✓ Like to use social media, apps for texting or social interactions
- ✓ Multimedia-oriented
- ✓ More visual-oriented
- ✓ See technology as integrated into their lives

Digital Immigrants

- ✓ Tend to handle one task at a time
- ✓ Prefer doing tasks in order
- ✓ Tend to communicate more in real time via phone or in-person
- ✓ Accustomed to accessing information linearly
- ✓ More text-oriented
- ✓ See technology as an “add-on”

The Digital Divide: “Speaking Library”

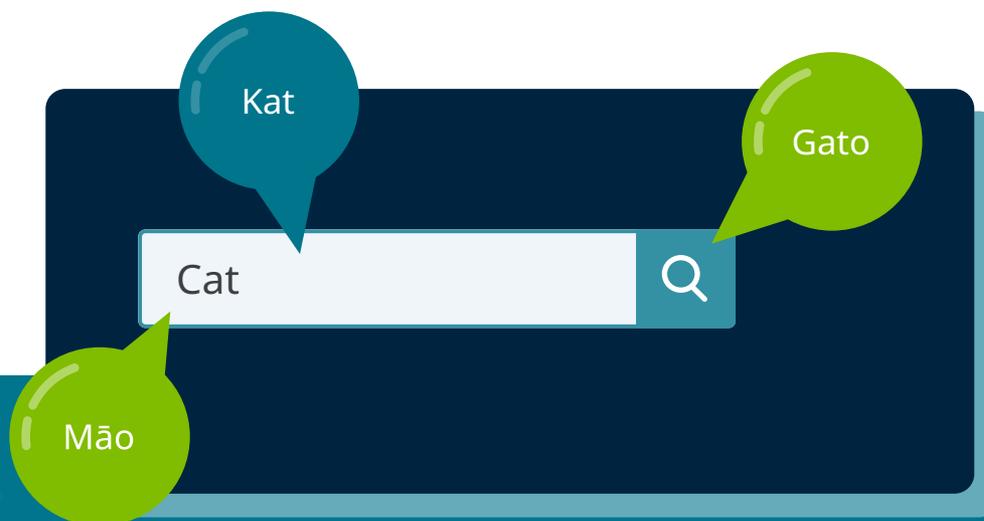
Patrons who are trained in library search know how to phrase a search term, set up advanced search parameters and navigate their way through various databases to find the items they want in the format they need.

Essentially, they “speak” library and expect the library to have digital resources that are robust enough to let them flex their research muscles.

However, plenty of people feel that even though the library’s digital tools are written in English, it might as well be a foreign language. They don’t know how to conduct a search properly and are frustrated when they find themselves either in a dead end or overwhelmed with irrelevant results. This group wishes they could use their own words to find what they need and want the library’s systems to have enough common sense to understand what an everyday person is looking for.

The Digital Divide: Non-Native English Speakers

Then, there are those who either don't speak English or don't speak it well and assume that unless they find a librarian who can translate what's on the computer screen that the library's digital resources won't be able to help them. They literally need the library's systems to be able to translate from their language and understand what they hope to find.



The Digital Divide: Complicated Library Access

Plenty of people in the community need career help. Some people might be building businesses or working on do-it-yourself projects. Still others could be looking for legal resources, investigating citizenship, researching consumer products, trying to figure out how to fix their refrigerator, or be engaged in academic pursuits.

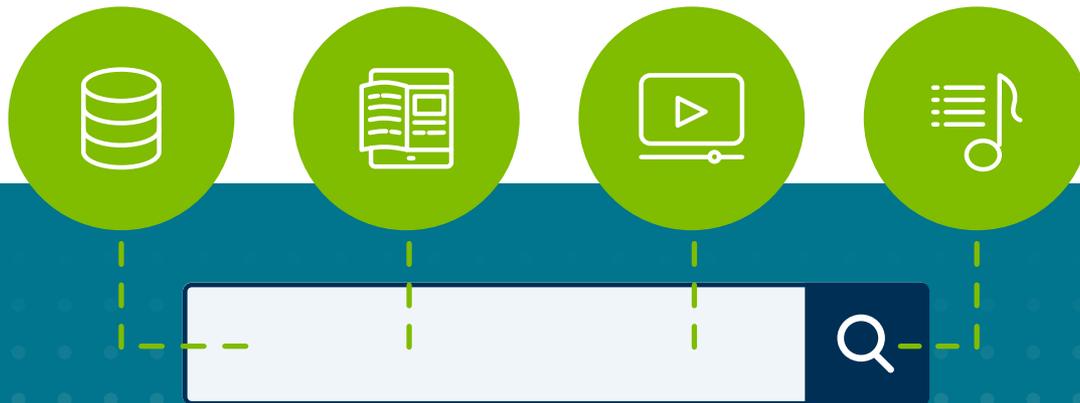
Some members of the public are aware that the library has resources to help them, but may not know how to access them, might imagine that it will be a hassle to find them, or think they are just as well-off going to the open web.

And probably many more people have no idea that the library can come to their rescue.

All of these groups want a simple, single location where they can easily find the e-books, magazines, databases and other resources they need to match their topic of interest.

How A Discovery Service Can Help

A discovery service provides library users a single point of entry into the library's collections. Just as a supermarket is an easy experience open to all that spares the shopper from having to go to the butcher, the baker and so on, the discovery service saves the patron from having to bounce between various collections of databases and resources, potentially getting lost and frustrated. It takes the library's catalog, databases, e-books, magazines, video and music files, and any type of digital content and makes them available through a single search index.

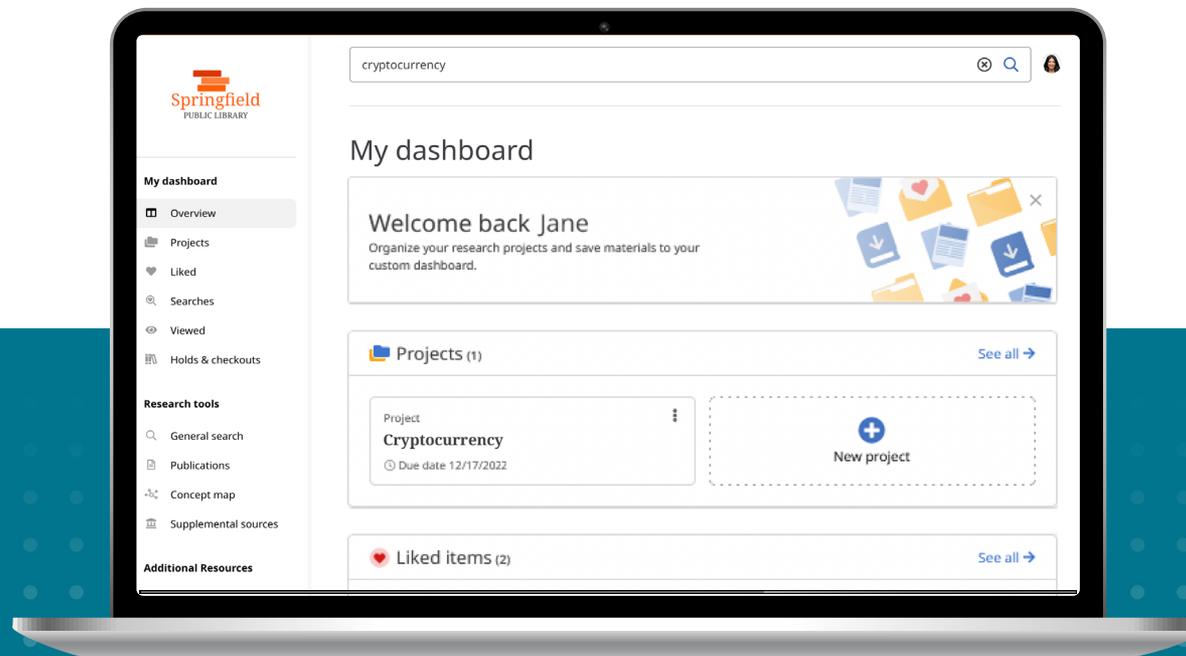


How A Discovery Service Can Help

In order to appeal to your diverse patron population, look for the following features and functionality that can take search and research to the next level:



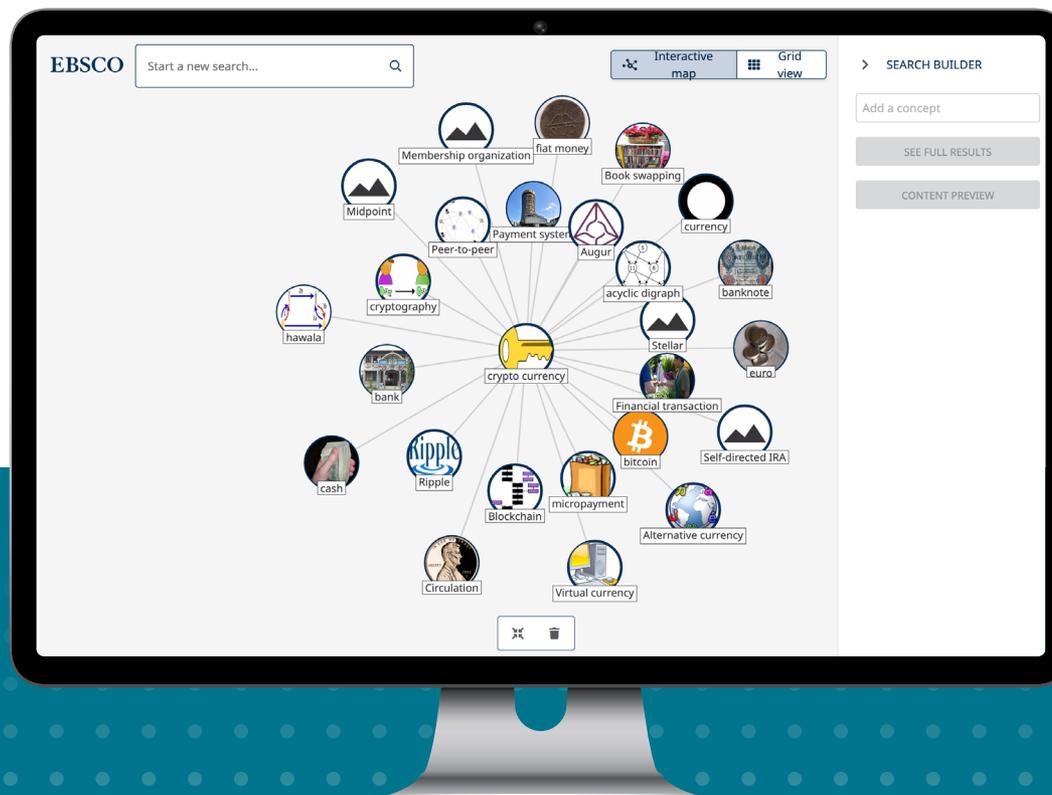
Personalized dashboards - The dashboard serves as the patrons' virtual personalized "home" in the library, where folders can be kept, patrons can see searches and projects they created, and liked items can be "stored."



How A Discovery Service Can Help



Visual aids – A discovery service that offers visual representation of related subjects and concepts helps patrons further explore their research and make new connections across related topics.



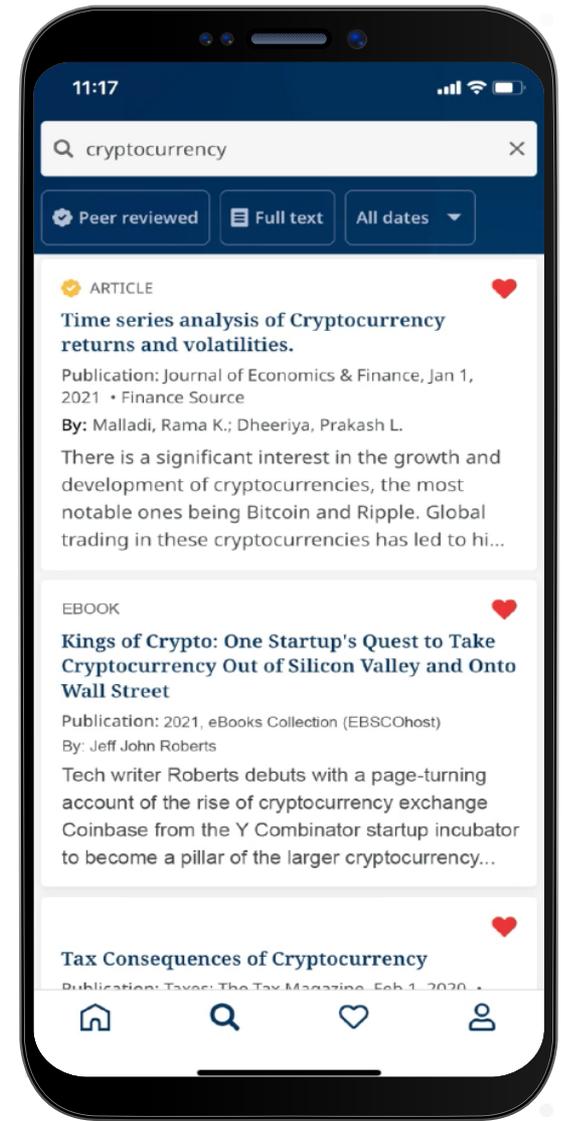
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Mobile – Leveraging a discovery mobile app matches your digital natives' UX needs. With an enhanced mobile experience, patrons' research can be quickly accessed and saved, allowing progress to be made anywhere, any time. Patrons can discover new content based on previous activity and take advantage of mobile device technology such as biometric authentication and voice-to-text searching. They can also keep articles organized with cross-device synchronization, and share resources with friends.



Modern results lists - Patrons can click to open the full text of an article in PDF or HTML or download items for offline viewing.



EBSCO Discovery Service (EDS) is the premier single search tool that connects any patron to all their library's online resources at any time – from e-books to magazines to full-text articles to everything else in their library's collection. With a user interface that takes an accessibility-first approach, EDS is built for cross-device research on both desktop and mobile platforms.

[Learn More](#)

Sources:

1 Prensky, M. (2001). Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants Part 1. *On the Horizon*, 9(5), 1–6.

2 "Digital Natives", American Library Association, February 19, 2015.

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3 Zur, O. & Walker, A. (2011, January 1). On Digital Immigrants and Digital Natives: How the Digital Divide Affects Families, Educational Institutions, and the Workplace. Zur Institute. <https://www.zurinstitute.com/digital-divide/#differences>

4 Riegel, C., & Mete, R. (2017). Educational Technologies for K-12 Learners: What Digital Natives and Digital Immigrants Can Teach One Another. *Educational Planning*, 24(4), 49–58.

5 Karpati, A. (2009). Web 2 Technologies for Net Native Language Learners: A "Social CALL." *ReCALL*, 21(2), 139–156.