

Measuring the Benefit of *EBSCO Discovery* Service in Corporations



Introduction

Corporate libraries face the extraordinary challenge of optimizing information resource usage during times of level to declining budgets. While the demand for information, from operational professional and R&D staff alike, continues to grow, library resources are being stretched ever thinner. Discovery services can provide tangible and intangible benefits to the corporation in this environment. The tangible benefits can be measured in terms of Return on Investment (ROI). The intangible benefits can be estimated as the Impact on Business (IOB).

ROI is best used for activities that can be measured using accepted financial accounting principles. It is important to clearly define what you are measuring with the ROI calculation and what you are not measuring with it.

IOB is best used when the measurements are not definable using accepted financial accounting principles, but the benefit to be measured is still significant. IOB is an approximation, to be sure, but it can be an important tool for justifying investment in a discovery service.

ROI of Discovery

The ROI of discovery services includes:

1. Time saved using a single search via an *EBSCO Discovery Service* (EDS) index versus searching multiple databases one at time
2. Increased use of licensed content
3. Saved document delivery costs

Users can spend hours searching the open web or across multiple databases, entering the same search terms again and again. They are forced to review individual result lists and attempt to select the most relevant records each time. This process is time-consuming, to say the least. Being able to search a single index saves time in two ways:

- **One search vs. several:** The time saved per search can range from minutes to hours, depending on the nature of the searches being conducted.
- **Anticipates user intent and provides relevant results:** The subject indexing within EDS provides precision for users retrieving millions of articles and books, delivering better matches at the top of the results. This kind of result precision eliminates “re-searches” for users and saves time. When these time savings are added up over many employees and over many months, the savings are substantial and easily quantified.

By identifying all of an organization's research sources and creating a single index for that content beforehand, end users are exposed to data sets that they may otherwise not know existed. Often, specific databases are located in different offices, countries, or just different areas on the company intranet. The effect is the same: content is not used as widely as it could be. Database usage can be readily tracked, and increases (or decreases) in usage can be used to prove the value of specific information resources to the organization.

In cases when researchers are not able to find full text content related to their online searches, they often request an article via the more expensive document delivery option. Discovery services can cut down on the frequency of document deliveries by not only identifying relevant content, but also providing broader access to full-text content. With discovery services, full-text results are presented to the user through various methods, including full-text linking from and through databases and online journal and magazine subscriptions. Through the use of these link resolvers, the discovery system exhausts every possible full-text delivery option that is already paid for by a researcher's institution, before forcing the researcher to resort to the document delivery mechanism. Measuring the ratio of document delivery requests to total full-text requests or to total searches is an easy way to measure the ROI of this capability.

Because these three ROI-measured benefits can be defined by time saved or numbers of downloads or numbers of searches, they provide an empirical measure of benefit to the organization.

IOB of Discovery

The IOB of discovery services includes:

1. Optimized content review
2. Optimized collection development
3. Discovery

These IOB benefits are less easily translated to specific accounting methods but are significant and should be tracked in some way in order to fully capture the benefits of Discovery Services to an organization. Unlike a federated search, which attempts to combine results from different databases AFTER the search, discovery services index all the content in the databases BEFORE the search takes place. In a discovery service, the user is searching a single index, so the results are relevancy ranked before being returned to the end user, and the relevancy is ranked from the entire discovery data set, not mashed together post search the way a federated service does.

End users can easily identify the most relevant content from the full range of available data and be more confident in the applicability of specific results to their research need. Just the simple ability to scan a unified result list in relevancy order improves end user confidence in their results. Ultimately, this confidence can shorten online research time and speed the production of reports and research using that content.

Librarians or other information professionals can analyze discovery service usage logs to identify periodicals or even databases that were most heavily used in the previous quarter or year. These usage statistics can be most viewed full text, most downloaded full text, documents most requested for delivery, and more. There can be a transition point, where enough document delivery requests, for example, can trigger a subscription to that title because the subscription cost is less than the cost to purchase all of the documents delivered individually from that same title.

Probably the most difficult to quantify but the most impactful benefit is when a researcher achieves an epiphany. The human brain is unique in its ability to find connections in seemingly unrelated items. Discovery services present content from disparate sources in one common result list. Sometimes the end user can generate intelligence from the information presented, making unanticipated connections based upon their own knowledge base. This “discovery” can generate great revenue opportunities or great savings for a company. However, “discovery” cannot be assumed, and it’s difficult to trace the revenue back to a single moment of realization.

The most effective way to approximate the IOB of discovery is over time. We can look at aggregate performance factors over a number of quarters or years, including before the Discovery Service is implemented, and after. We can be sure that any number of factors can contribute to growth, but if we can isolate specific variables, we can get a feeling for their power to contribute to the overall results. This is simple econometrics, and it can be useful in showing how Discovery Services can impact an operation’s bottom line even when the direct contribution cannot be measured.

Conclusion

How one defines the corporate reference function within their organization is a key consideration for determining the role of information and how it is accessed. It is critical to place corporate reference in the overall continuum of organizational information management and its contribution to long-term, sustainable competitive advantage. The value of a discovery service to an organization is found in the research and reference processes it touches or influences, not just the search function it performs directly. The corporate librarian can help others in the organization to understand the value of discovery services by identifying the touch points and explaining how the discovery function adds value. If that value is not measurable in the strict ROI sense, it is certainly demonstrable from the IOB perspective. Promoting the value of the discovery services includes analyzing the return on specific investments in corporate R&D operation and understanding the impact of discovered information relationships on the overall business.

About *EBSCO Discovery Service*

Understanding what a user needs and wants is the first step to successful research. *EBSCO Discovery Service* includes features and technology built on user research to help users get exactly what they're looking for. EDS provides an intuitive user interface and a single search box to surface the most relevant information to your users from both paid and internal resources.

Learn more: <https://www.ebsco.com/corporations/products/ebsco-discovery-service>