With effective, efficient access to electronic resources becoming an increasingly critical issue for MINITEX-region libraries, the Working Group on Open Linking Software has decided to coordinate an educational symposium, scheduled for Nov. 19, 2002, to provide information about OpenURL functionality and to identify relevant vendors and existing products that use this technology for linking references and resources. With its goal of enabling context-sensitive link resolution, OpenURL can help libraries provide their users with information about their options for retrieving an identified resource – by helping to ensure that users are presented with retrieval options appropriate for the particular individual. In addition to providing information, the Nov. 19 symposium will also be used to explore the level of interest in OpenURL products among MINITEX participating libraries.

The symposium, which will be held at the Earle Brown Center, St. Paul Campus, University of Minnesota, will be open to directors and staff of libraries throughout the MINITEX region. Depending upon the level of interest, a formal Request for Proposal may be prepared to investigate the possibilities for a consortial purchase of an OpenURL product.

BACKGROUND

The Working Group on Open Linking Software was created in Spring 2002 as a subgroup of the MINITEX/LDS Joint Standards Review Task Force to:

- investigate the open linking software currently available on the market.
- determine whether and how such software could be beneficial for libraries in the three-state region.

Group members include: Michael Kathman, College of St. Benedict/St. John’s University, Chair; Rod Bruce, MnSCU/PALS; Eric Celeste, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities; Keith Ewing, St. Cloud State University; Terri Fishel, Macalester College; Marsha Fralick, Minneapolis Public Library; Philip Herold, MnLINK; Marilyn Montgomery, Minnesota State University, Mankato; and Bill DeJohn, Angi Faiks, and Cecelia Boone, MINITEX.

After an initial meeting during which staff from Macalester College demonstrated their use of SFX (an OpenURL service developed by Ex Libris), the Working Group decided to issue a Request for Information (RFI) to known OpenURL vendors. The RFI (a copy of which is attached) described a number of scenarios for use of OpenURL products by MINITEX region libraries and sought information about currently available OpenURL products. RFI responses were received from Endeavor for LinkFinder Plus, Ex Libris for SFX, Fretwell-Downing for Open Linking Technology, and Openly Informatics for 1Cate.

The Working Group met June 5 to review the responses and decided to prepare a report on its discussions and to arrange the Fall symposium.


GOALS FOR OPENURL TECHNOLOGY & CONSORTIAL PURCHASE

The Working Group sees use of an OpenURL product as potentially providing the following benefits:

- to provide seamless access to electronic resources.
- to provide appropriate access for the individual patron (i.e., solve “the appropriate copy” issue).
- to provide statistics to help library staff know more about usage of available resources.
- to maximize usage of resources provided through licenses negotiated by consortia and individual libraries.

By exploring a consortial approach to purchase of an OpenURL product, the Working Group is seeking to determine the advantages (in terms of cost, sharing of knowledge, and options for product implementation) that would be available to libraries that choose to participate. The vendor information provided in response to the RFI identified a number of attractive features and benefits contained within the individual products and within the OpenURL Protocol itself. The Group decided not to make a detailed analysis of the individual products at this early stage in its review.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

The Working Group has discussed a possible schedule that would include:

- Host educational day on Nov. 19.
- Prepare a Request for Proposal by Jan. 2003, if there is sufficient interest.
- Receive vendor responses to the RFP by the end of March.

ISSUES DISCUSSED TO DATE

What functionality can OpenURL products provide?

The OpenURL framework allows for creation of localized, context-sensitive links that present library users with options for retrieving known items from sources licensed, owned, or otherwise accessible to the individual user. The goal is to avoid the dead end links that frustrate users and leave other existing retrieval options unidentified and unexplored.

The OpenURL concept has been developed in recent years to answer the question of how to get the user to the “appropriate copy” of a resource – whether that involves informing the user that the library has access to versions of an electronic journal article from an aggregator database as well as directly from the publisher; or

- From a record in an abstracting and indexing database (A&I) to the full-text described by the record;
- From a record describing a book in a library catalogue to a description of the same book in an Internet book shop;
- From a reference in a journal article to a record matching that reference in an A&I database."

or

- From a citation in a journal article to a record in a library catalogue that shows the library holdings of the cited journal;
• From a journal title to impact factor information in ISI's Journal Citation Reports;
• From a stock ticker symbol found in a record from the ABI/Inform database to on-line stock information;
• From title words or subject headings of a scholarly article to related information in Internet search engines.


**What types of functionality are outside the scope of OpenURL products?**

OpenURL products are not a panacea for all the problems of linking users and electronic resources. Other products perform different functions. For example:

• portal technology, like Ex Libris’ Metalib, helps libraries to provide uniform and integrated access to their resources.
• serials management systems, like Serials Solution, JournalWebCite, and TDNet, can provide web lists of information about all serials owned by a library, whether in print, microform, or electronic resources.

**What is the history of development of open linking technology?**

Work on open linking technology began in the late 1990s with the goal of providing open, generalized, and robust systems to solve the problems of linking users and resources. The OpenURL framework, developed initially by Herbert Van de Sompel and colleagues at Ghent University, Belgium, has become an important part on open linking technology because it outlines the nuts and bolts of how reference linking can occur. A committee of the National Information Standards Organization (NISO) is working to develop a draft standard based on the OpenURL framework. The vendors identified above have developed products based on the emerging protocol.

**Are there advantages to selecting an OpenURL product now as opposed to waiting?**

• Patron responses to OpenURL implementations have been consistently positive.
• OpenURL technology can increase effective use of already-purchased products, increasing the impact of those dollars.
• Efficient use of OpenURL technology takes practice, the sooner we start, the sooner we become experts.

**What options exist for funding for OpenURL products?**

• state legislative appropriations to MINITEX or other agencies
• grant applications
• purchase by individual libraries.

**What costs are involved in OpenURL products?**

• initial product cost
• implementation cost
• ongoing maintenance costs
FOR MORE INFORMATION, SEE:


“Internet Librarian ‘SFX: A Linkalicious Service’” Karen Schneider *American Libraries* June 2001 v32 i6 p118


**Website for NISO Committee AX, the committee charged with developing the OpenURL Standard:**

[http://library.caltech.edu/openurl/](http://library.caltech.edu/openurl/)

**Vendor websites:**


Ex Libris SFX: [http://www.sfxit.com/](http://www.sfxit.com/)


Openly Informatics 1Cate: [http://www.openly.com/1cate/about.html](http://www.openly.com/1cate/about.html)