

SFX IN THE LIBRARY

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ABSTRACT: The promotional literature from Ex Libris, the producer of SFX for federated searching tells us that it: "... offers libraries a proven solution for linking their diverse, ever increasing set of electronic resources. SFX provides the robustness, flexibility, and independence that libraries need for defining links to help their patrons navigate to the resources and services relevant to their search results—services that include, for example, the desktop delivery of journal articles or e-books. Reference librarians can choose appropriate content from a range of information providers and interconnect this content as desired. Using the web-based interface to administer the SFX knowledge base, librarians select and set the targets of the links only once for all information resources, a process that eliminates duplication of effort." My presentation will evaluate the product in actual use, and relate the challenges, or not, of its installation.

The format of my presentation is the Ex-Libris-produced description of SFX services first, followed by examples of the product as installed and used by Texas A&M University. The Galveston campus, where I work, is a branch campus of the main university, 140 miles distant. The tremendous advantage to our Galveston campus is the technical expertise provided by the College Station (main) campus, so you can expect my views are more nearly those of the end-user rather than the technical installer, so details of installation are not presented.

The initials "SFX" are short hand for "special effects" borrowed from the movie industry. We hope that library users find these "special effects" like a magic box that connects several methods of information searching with retrieval of documents. We expect to be following SFX installation with Metalib later in 2004 or 2005. Perhaps that will be a topic of a poster or talk later on.

The objective of SFX is to act as an independent link server to a wide variety of e-documents, see illustration 1 below. So, whether information is provided by an abstracting and indexing service, a portal, OPAC, e-print, full text, web form, table of contents, or a citation, SFX will provide links between them.

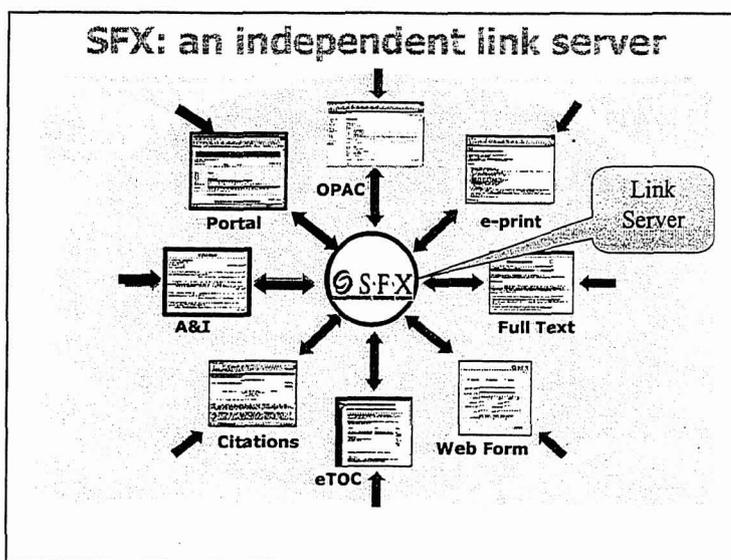


Illustration 1. SFX links a wide variety of information resources

The enabling mechanism is resolution of an Open URL for the desired end product. The precision of the URL varies for example, by publisher for e-journal content. In some cases this can only be resolved to the level of an "issue", for example the table of contents for a May 2003 issue. The user may have to tab through a table of contents and select the particular item desired. Other e-journal publishers, and the Elsevier titles found in Science Direct are good examples, make resolution directly to the article possible. In the case of an OPAC, the level of resolution is a catalog entry.

SFX software has a set of rules for locating "targets" and that information is in the SFX KnowledgeBase. This is a proprietary product of Ex Libris which regularly updates and distributes it via the web. It includes a set of rules for fine-tuning, and is "localized" by the library to match local subscriptions and conditions using SFX tools. That step is a time-intensive, customizing service according to each individual library – which journals are subscribed to, which services provide what kind of content, for what date range.

Illustration 2 provides a snapshot of how an end-user sees an SFX linked process. This Ex-Libris-illustrated starting point ("SFX Source") is a search in the EBSCO Host database. The user then clicks on the SFX button, which brings up the SFX Menu shown here. SFX has inserted the relevant information from the Source EBSCO Host into the Menu. The Menu gives the user several selections for locating the item cited. In this case, the first selection is linking to Full Text . That is highlighted in orange on the menu. By clicking on the highlighted text, the next stage is that the article appears, in this case resolved to the article and not just a table of contents, and it appears here as the Target.

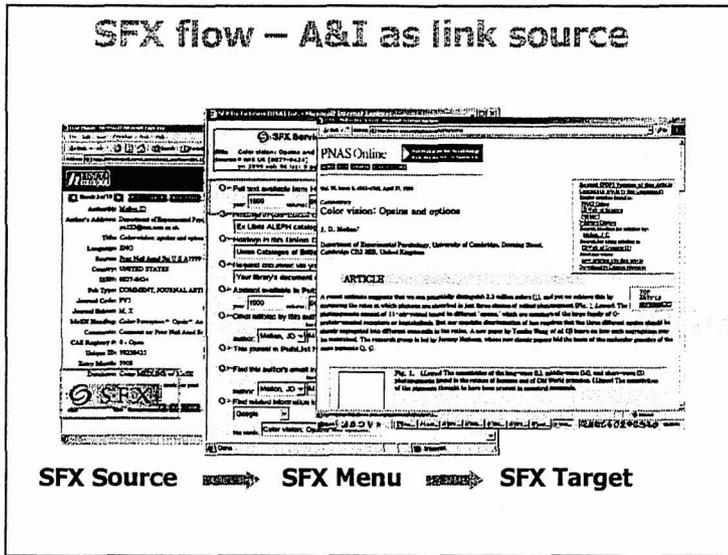


Illustration 2. How SFX works, as seen by an end user

Illustration 3 is the Citation Linker function. This works in the instance where one has a citation in hand, and an information resource “target” is desired. I have inserted the citation information from the journal *Aquatic Sciences*; date 2001, volume 63, issue 2, start page 123, in the example. When the “go” button is clicked, the menu of Illustration 4 comes up. Clicking on “full text” takes us to a table of contents, where the user must scroll down and click on the article to come up with full text/image.

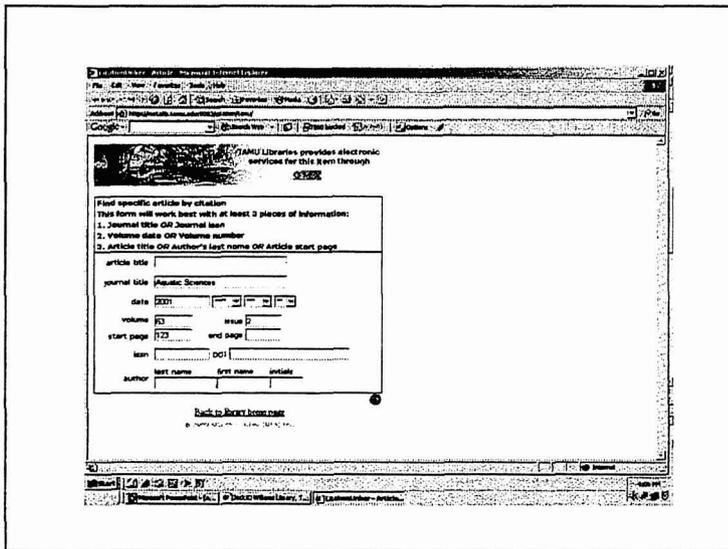


Illustration 3. Citation Linker function, screen shot from Texas A&MU instance

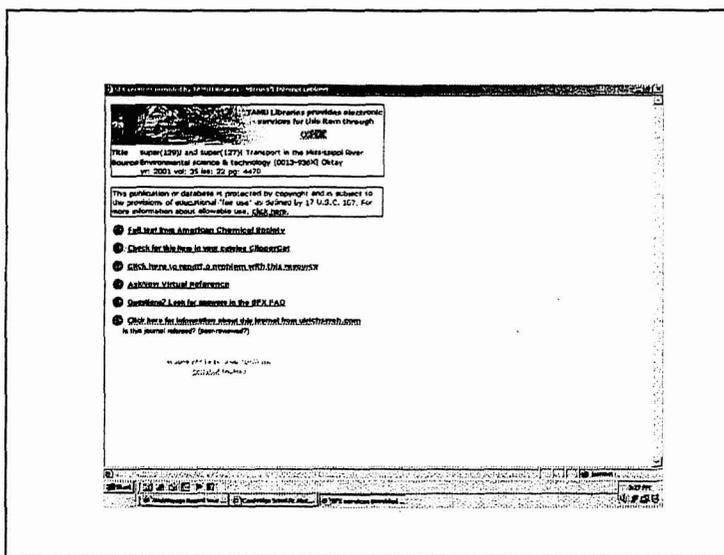


Illustration 4. SFX Menu resulting from information input per illustration 3. Screen shot from Texas A&M University instance

SFX isn't a perfect resolution to all our "finding" problems, but it is very helpful and it will be "interesting" to see how this combined with Metalib will once again revolutionize information retrieval for our Library.

Sources for illustrations:

Illustration 1. "SFX: and independent link server" slide from SFX Overview Power Point produced and available from the Ex Libris Documentation Center. Proprietary information from www.exlibrisgroup.com/docs/ Downloaded August 18, 2004. Used with permission by ExLibris, Inc.

Illustration 2. "SFX flow – A&I as link source" slide from SFX Overview Power Point produced and available from the Ex Libris Documentation Center. Proprietary information from www.exlibrisgroup.com/docs/ Downloaded August 18, 2004. Used with permission by ExLibris, Inc.

Illustration 3. "Citation Linker function, screen shot from Texas A&MU instance" Download from <http://metalib.tamu.edu:9003/citation/tamu/> plus input, August 19, 2004

Illustration 4. "SFX Menu resulting from information input per illustration 3. Screen shot from Texas A&M University instance" from http://metalib.tamu.edu:9003/tamu?sid=sfx:citation&genre=article&title=Aquatic%20Sciences&date=2001&volume=63&issue=2&spage=123&__char_set=utf8, August 19, 2004