

Expert Searchers' adaptations to the new design of the Ovid platform: a survey

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Introduction

This project evolved as a means to test the benefits and drawbacks of the Ovid redesign (as well as its features that have not changed) in a group of professional information scientists and librarians.

I was curious as to whether I was the only one having difficulty adjusting to the new design. How do layout and design, as well as functionality, affect the quality of the search?

How does database layout and functionality affect the search process?

Survey Background

Questions for the survey were drawn from some of my concerns and questions about the recent redesign of Ovid. Ovid SP was introduced in late 2007 and it became compulsory to use the new platform on February 1st 2008.

The focus of the survey questions is on ease of use, whether a change has had an impact on the user's search, accuracy, and what users have done, if anything, to adapt to the new interface.

The following criteria from Merton et al. (2003) have helped inform what sort of questions the survey should ask.

Six Criteria for good website design

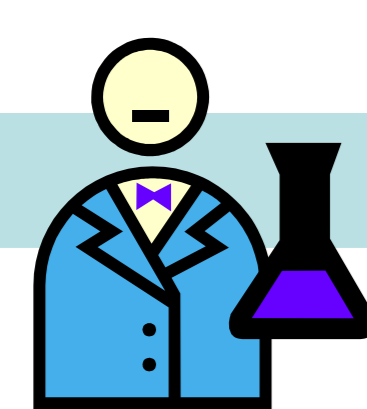
Visual design	Search
Information Architecture	Universal Usability
Navigation	Help

Deployment

The survey was designed in MS Word tested on 4 colleagues—they were invited to trial it and to give comments.

The survey was adapted to SurveyMonkey.com and made available there, via an emailed link, from 13th May until the 29th May 2008.

A total of 18 email discussion lists, and 1 community of practice, CHAIN, were sent invitations to participate in the survey. A reminder email was sent to all lists on 27th May.

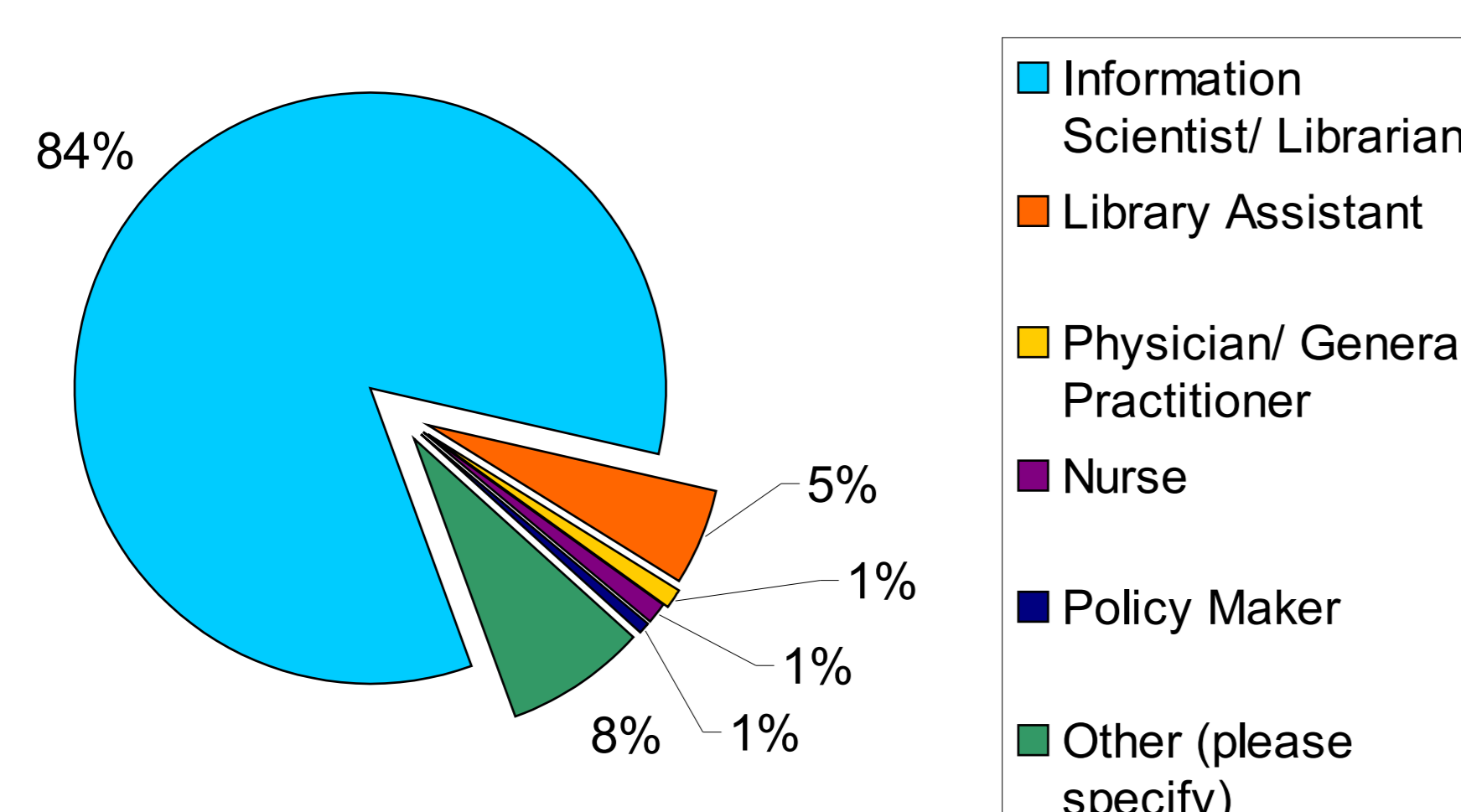


Results

Number of respondents

The response was more enthusiastic than expected. Although there were 533 respondents, there were only 243 complete responses. Many respondents skipped questions that required a typed answer.

Question: What is your professional title?



Databases Experience

92.5% (493 out of 533) respondents have used Ovid Gateway, the previous version of Ovid.

How often do you use the Ovid SP platform?

Frequency	Response Percent	Response Count
At least once a day	40.9%	191
Several times a week	35.8%	167
Once a week	7.3%	34
Several times a month	9.9%	46
Once a month or less	6.2%	29
<i>answered question</i>		467 / 533

How did you adapt?

Placement of the Search Box

I have learned to look for it at the top	52.80%
I have searched as I would normally	41.50%
I have accidentally scrolled down instead of up	31.30%

New design of Edit Current Search

I edit my search as I would normally	55.10%
Other (please specify)	27.90%
I use the mouse cursor to read across the screen	16.60%

Note: Many who selected Other either did not **use** Edit Current Search, did not **know** about it, or did not make any **change** in their behaviour.

Placement & Configuration of Results Manager

I know where to look for it, but it took some getting used to	58.50%
I look for it at the bottom of the page	27.50%

Search History

I find I scroll far too much when using the search history	29.40%
I do not contract the search history and find it to be ideal	26.40%

Text Size & Font

	Good	Poor
Text size	76%	24%
Font	85%	15%

If you could change one thing...

17% of respondents wanted to remove or hide the Ovid Tips

12% wanted to move Results Manager; many wanted to return it to the bottom of the screen

9% wanted to move the Search box back to under the Search History

Themes

Certain themes predominated:

Time-consuming: the process of relearning where to find things and how to use new features takes some time

Irritating: some respondents found it frustrating adapting to a new interface

Screen 'real estate': many respondents were concerned about the usage of screen space by the new design and features—such as the Tips on the right hand side, and the new placement of Results Manager

It's Fine: many respondents thought the new design was fine, or it had not had an impact on their searching—this group is different from the **conflicted no-impactors**.

Heterogeneity of responses: what was "annoying" to one person was "fine" to another!

- Thank you -

To all survey participants
To my colleagues for your advice
To Wendy Zhou, at CHAIN

Pow!

Did it impact your search?

Search Box

40% said SB position had no impact

13% had to scroll more or constantly

Edit Current Search

53% said the appearance had no impact

14% did not use it or did not know it existed

Search History

44% said the appearance had no impact

10% found using it cumbersome or irritating

Results Manager

42% said the change in configuration had no impact

20% found the configuration poor and it was awkward to use

13% found it time-consuming to use

Text Size and Font

60% said the size or font had no impact

15% found that readability was poor and the text was too small

What Improves Usability?

Search Aid – not a people-pleaser

Search Aid was the least likely to be used, with **63% opting not to use this new feature**.

Remove Selected – very popular

83% of respondents found it improved the usability of Ovid SP. The 11% who do not use Remove Selected might want to give it a try.

The best and the worst for accuracy

Best Function:

- Boolean buttons on Search History

Poorest Function:

- Basic Search

Discussion

Conflicted 'No Impact' respondents

Many respondents stated 'no impact' was made by the layout and functionality. A number of these responses, however, were conflicted.

Were they only considering the finished 'output' of the search and not the holistic experience?

Regarding font size:

"No [impact]. But it's annoyingly small."

Limitations of the Survey

2. The sample was comprised of members of email discussion groups in the UK, Canada, USA, Australia, New Zealand and Europe.
3. Many (perhaps time-poor) participants declined to fill in the essay-style questions.
4. The survey was written in English.
5. Screenshots were difficult to administer on SurveyMonkey leaving participants with a lack of visual examples.