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## SFX: Providing Easier Access to E-Journals and Other Digital Scholarly Resources

By **Gloria Rohmann & Tom McNulty**

*[Ed: Links to web pages and/or e-mail addresses which have become inactive since the publication of this article have been enclosed in curly brackets { }. Replacement links have been provided where possible.]*

Have you ever had the experience of searching a database, finding a citation to an article you really want, and then wondering where to go to get the full text version? Is it in BobCat? Is it in one of those "packages" of e-journals, like JSTOR? Or maybe one of those huge general databases, like ProQuest? Searching all of the possibilities can be frustrating and time-consuming. Sometimes, you find that the journal you want doesn't appear to be available electronically at all, so you make a trip into the library to use the print version, or, if the library doesn't have it, you order a copy through interlibrary loan.

How did the world of e-journals become so complicated? In the "brick and mortar" library of the past, things were simpler, if less convenient. The library either subscribed to a journal or it didn't. Journal titles were in the library's catalog, along with books, non-print media, and everything else. The catalog offered real one-stop shopping. Now, in addition to its print collections, the library subscribes to individual e-journals and provides access to large e-journal collections (like JSTOR and Project Muse); these are actually the easiest ones to find—they're all in BobCat, like their paper counterparts. One of the big challenges today is finding individual articles in those huge general databases, like ProQuest, that have some full-text articles, along with many that provide only citations and abstracts.

Finally, a solution to this problem is emerging. Searching for the elusive electronic journal article or other digital object is becoming more streamlined with the introduction of a new tool called SFX. With SFX, a local server maintained by a library can dynamically create links to information sources, regardless of who hosts

them—the library itself or other information providers.

### How Does It Work?

SFX is based on an emerging international standard for web-based information exchange called "OpenURL." (Developed by Herbert Van de Sompel at Ghent University, Belgium. For more information, see <http://www.sfxit.com>). To provide an OpenURL, the index or catalog must be able to deliver bibliographic information in this format. Most of the leading digital information suppliers—including Ovid, ProQuest, SilverPlatter and OCLC FirstSearch—can send OpenURLs to NYU's local SFX server. The local SFX server contains links to the providers of full text and catalog holdings. Most of Bobst Library's popular electronic journal packages can be linked in this way; some will deliver a link to the article, while others will bring the searcher to the journal title or table of contents level. And when the sought-after item cannot be located, SFX even streamlines the process of ordering an interlibrary loan! (see fig. #1)



Figure #1. The SFX menu. Knowing that most researchers are looking for full-text articles, we've put this right at the top. If full text is not available, the next option is a quick BobCat look-up. Still no luck? Search hundreds of other libraries in WorldCat, or submit an interlibrary loan request.

SFX does a lot for the researcher, but it also does a lot of "behind the scenes" library work that previously required many, many hours of staff time. Notably, it enables us to provide an up-to-date, A-Z list of our electronic journal titles. Take a look at this feature on the new NYU Libraries website, {<http://dlib.home.nyu.edu/library/>} (currently in beta testing) *Replacement URL:* <http://library.nyu.edu/diglib/>, and let us know what you think.

### Author Biographies

*Gloria Rohmann is Head of Media & Electronic Services at NYU Libraries. She can be reached at [gloria.rohmann@nyu.edu](mailto:gloria.rohmann@nyu.edu).*

*Tom McNulty is Librarian for Fine Arts at NYU Libraries. He can be reached at [tom.mcnulty@nyu.edu](mailto:tom.mcnulty@nyu.edu).*

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