

Supporting the academic work of UK HE researchers and educators- Zetoc-user interviews

Five semi-structured interviews were conducted with Zetoc users between Jan 25 2010 and Feb 02 2010. The purpose of the work was to gain a better understanding of how the service is being used by researchers and educators in their work. Of particular interest was how the service provided a unique function. While the interviews provided a much more detailed picture of the Zetoc market, for a fuller picture more rigorous research would be necessary – for instance, interviewing non-users to understand why an individual chooses not to use Zetoc and also evaluative comparisons of Zetoc to other services.

Common themes

Zetoc Service (Search, Alert & RSS):

- Saves the user time in finding and accessing material providing
 - convenience
 - support for linking to full-text material (via OpenURL)
 - delivery and format options
- Provides a comprehensive coverage that is perceived as 'unique' or 'not found elsewhere' and offers/supports:
 - cross/inter-disciplinary research and practice
 - serendipitous discovery
 - convenience
 - quality-assured, definitive data
 - substantial backfile access, ie to 'non-current' articles and papers
- Provides Alerting that is highly valued for a user's current awareness
 - via email or RSS, as best fits working practice
 - in relation to essential, 'key' journals
 - of more 'obscure' journals
 - of 'non-subscribed' journal content, for which inter-library loan may be used.
- Is used in teaching research methods and current awareness.

All interviewees would find it more difficult to perform their research without Zetoc, likely impacts include:

- the quality of the work would be compromised
- work processes would take significantly longer or be unfeasible
- work wouldn't be completed to the same standard.

XXXX – Postdoctoral Researcher, Entomology, UK Institution

XXXX major interest is in Mosquito flight behaviours, and how mosquitoes get together. Over the past 5 years he has been working with Western Flower Thrips, which he did for his Post-doc and is presently working on 'How mosquitoes communicate in free flight prior to copulation'.

It is essential to keep abreast of pertinent literature due to the fast pace of this research area: "All the money is in medicine and things that cause human diseases. So Mosquito literature is very quick, Thrips not so much but there have been some interesting new chemistry techniques that in the last year have gone absolutely crazy". He later gave a detailed explanation of how a new technology (Head Space Microextraction) had come to the fore and he was surprised to receive alerts telling him that it was also being used in other fields (detecting 'corked' wine). "It's opened up a different field!", he said.

He also used Zetoc when demonstrating and teaching degree level biology at Keele University on a field course "where I needed to use journal searches to keep update to date and keep one step ahead of the students. So basically Zetoc has been invaluable in that. It's the easiest way of keeping abreast of the literature and it is impossible not to use it."

XXXX said that he wouldn't find his job as easy without using Zetoc, as "Zetoc generally tends to cover everything, which is pretty handy. So I would say that's it's unique in that it's the only thing I know of that does that properly, better than MyNCBI and functional."

In response to the question of impact of his work if the service was not available XXX responded,

“Yes, my time is everything, it’s at a premium, I would not have the ability to wade through journals in vastly diverse subjects like for example fragrance chemistry. It fixes it by doing all the work for me in that respect and without it I would not be able to maintain the scope of my journal searches. I’d have to rely on NCBI and that produces well under a 1/3 of what Zetoc produces. “

Ian has found improvement with use of Shibboleth authentication and single sign.

XXXXX – Law (specifically the enforcement of food safety regulation and the control of outbreaks of food-borne disease), UK Institution.

XXXXXX research area is about how food safety enforcement works in the UK. The research is inter-disciplinary and he requires information from many different sources. The journals he uses are in economics, politics and food studies. He also teaches on a 1st year undergraduate public law course and uses the RSS feeds on Zetoc to provide alerts on journals relating to that subject area to keep up-to-date and check new literature. Anything of interest is used to provide updates on the student VLE and this avoids having to visit the library and trawl through journals. He recommends Zetoc (and Copac) to his MA students to encourage them to seek resources beyond the university holdings and feels this provides added value on their dissertations.

He’s used Zetoc to discover information that he was previously unaware of and that helps to support his research. “Zetoc has been very helpful in digging up some of this literature for me that I didn’t know existed. I knew there was stuff out there; I didn’t know where to find it, where to start with the literature, not being that familiar with it and Zetoc has played an important role in finding these things.” and added “It would have taken me ages in the library no doubt. Zetoc’s really improved that for me and it has really enabled me to get to those resources that I wouldn’t have done otherwise.”

“I’ve not found anything that has the breadth and depth of coverage that Zetoc has so it’s unique in how made different disciplinary sub-fields it aggregates.” “Some of the subscription services the university subscribes to are silos.” He said that he uses databases such as LexisNexis but they don’t give the breadth of coverage of Zetoc. He also uses things like JSTOR and national library catalogues.

He considers Zetoc to have a positive impact on the quality of his work, his current awareness and the time spent in research. “Please, please don’t take it away. Yes it would have an impact; it would make it a lot less convenient to do the searches I do. I think it would also have an adverse impact on the breadth of literature that I get into my research.” He considers the RSS feeds to be particularly important and valuable: “I’ve got myself into a routine where I’ve got quite a lot of journals feeding into my feed reader. I sit down in the morning when I’m eating my breakfast and I go through my RSS feed and see what has come up, journals, funding, conferences...If that wasn’t there I don’t know if I’d take the time to see what was coming out in the journals.”

In regard to improvement to the service he would find it useful to have access to material prior to 1993. He also stated that while he is happy with the search function, colleagues and students have indicated that they’d like to restrict searches to specific subject areas or fields of study. This is particularly the case with MA students who can sometimes feel overwhelmed by the amount of information they’re getting and have difficulty filtering the information.

In response to ‘would he wish to add anything further about the service and the use of it’ he added “Yes, don’t take it away”

XXXXXXX – Health Policy & Environmental Politics, UK Institution.

XXXXXX subject area is health policy, particularly patient and public involvement in health care around policy issues and how they influence guidelines and standards for services. As part of the research process she regularly searches the main bibliographic databases. “The other thing I find really useful and I think Zetoc adds to my work is that I regularly get the table of contents of key journals delivered to my inbox which I’m then able to read and see whether or not there are useful articles there.”

Apart from her research, XXX also does some teaching and finds Zetoc valuable in keeping up-to-date with the current debates and literature. This means that she can highlight current research in the classroom. "It's about making sure you're ahead of the game in a sense."

When asked about the impact if the Zetoc service were not available, her response was that without Zetoc she might not use the same breadth of material and it would add to her workload. She uses Zetoc to gain access to the TOC of journals that she knows are useful but that her library doesn't subscribe to. She then uses this information to apply for inter-library loans.

"One of the things I like about Zetoc is the serendipitous thing of having these table of contents delivered. You will come across things that you wouldn't necessarily search for but actually would be useful, just out of academic interest if nothing else. It would add to my workload if this didn't exist."

She would expect the library to have some sort of current awareness service instead if Zetoc didn't exist. Apart from that, she imagines that she would have to access the website of each of the journals and search them individually or use an A&I database. "I'm not aware of this kind of alert service being available by any other means."

In response to 'was there any enhancements and anything that she would like to add' in regard to the service. XXXXX replied, "I would like to say that I do think it adds to the ability of academics to do their jobs efficiently and effectively and I would hate for it to be removed."

XXXXX - Social & Visual Anthropology (particularly interested in ethnicity and identity).- UK Institution

XXXXX uses bibliographic resources to search for specific articles related to his research area and often uses Zetoc to support his work, searching the back files for relevant articles. He doesn't tend to use the current awareness service.

In response to how the service supports his work his responses were: "Zetoc provides information about journal articles that are not available in other databases." and "It's a very good database and source of information." He liked the fact that some of the less popular journals are also included - Zetoc often points him to articles in smaller, more obscure journals and to other fields. This is an aspect he finds interesting and that he values as it provides him with a good breadth of coverage. Jan really likes the facility to email bibliographic information about search results and articles in different formats and uses the feature regularly.

In regard to the impact on his work if the service was not available: "I could live without Zetoc in my research but I wouldn't like it to disappear as it's another good source." "It would make it harder to find something" and research would be less time efficient. It might also impact on the quality of work.

In regard to improvement of the service, XXX would like to be able to access full text directly from Zetoc rather than using OpenURL to link to subscription services. He likes services such as JSTOR because they provide direct and integrated access to full text content.

XXXXXXX- Lecturer in School of Nursing & Midwifery & Counsellor - UK Institution

XXXXXX she has a particular interest in palliative care and psychological support and also works as a counsellor, and has Zetoc alerts set up for the key psychology journals.

She values the service because "Zetoc saves me hours of hunting for the latest information in the areas that I teach. The alerts relating to the education journals have enlightened me on many topics (personal response systems, use of online resources for basic physiology teaching, etc). I can feel so much more confident that I am up to date. So often new work is published that I am not actually looking for at the time but that is invaluable as I try to persuade / motivate / nag my nursing students to seek out the current nursing literature ('I was just reading in the latest JAN...')

In response to whether Zetoc was unique: "Yes. The fact that it just comes into my inbox, and that's the only place I get alerts" "My inbox is open all day every day. I don't have to go hunting. It's very easy for me to access the journals that I've got – I just need to click and that will take me into the RGU [Robert Gordon] collection."

In response to the value of the service to her work role she replied that she uses Zetoc to keep up to date and to get ideas. "Because I get all the education ones, I know what the new developments are, and what other people have tried in their teaching. I'm always looking for ways to improve the way that I teach, the materials that I teach, find new resources, and I couldn't count the number of ideas that I've had." The inclusion of abstracts was highlighted as particularly useful. "Publishing abstracts was a huge plus for me. It allows me to triage what's important and what's not"

In response to the impact on her work if the service was not available: "I would cry! I wouldn't know the new stuff, I wouldn't know what other people are doing, what are the challenges that they are dealing with, which are so often the same as mine.....for me it's just essential and I don't know how other people manage without it."

XXXXX stressed the need to prioritise her work and the fact that Zetoc alerts were so quick was a bonus. "When it comes up, I know that it's going to take me 30 seconds to see if there's anything that I can use, and that's all. I can always squeeze in another 30 seconds. To go through the five minutes to do it the long way, well that's five minutes that I need elsewhere."

Content is comprehensive, she can access the TOC of anything she wants through Zetoc, but can't always get the full text due to local subscriptions. Full text is very important to her. She doesn't tend to use ILL services, as this is too time-consuming (although she conceded that she would if she were a researcher).

In response to improvement suggestions, she would welcome some easier way of cross-checking the Zetoc collection against local library collections (although she mentioned that she was aware this would be difficult).