Case Study: The University of Manchester

How The University of Manchester Library Reduced Support Ticket Volume by 25%

And improved usability to save 100 days of wasted researcher time per year
The Client

The University of Manchester Library is one of the great libraries of the world. It sits at the heart of England’s first and most eminent civic university, welcoming millions of students, researchers and visits every year to its 11 sites, which include The John Rylands Library, home to one of the most remarkable university Special Collections in the world.

The problem: The library’s search process was confusing and unyielding

From the volume and nature of their Electronic Resources Helpdesk support tickets the library staff at the University of Manchester knew they had a problem. Their search process was, as librarian Tim O’Neill put it, “cumbersome, ponderous, and long-winded.”

It was too difficult to use. The number of options was confusing. Links sent users to different vendor and third party websites and it wasn’t clear how to get the resource the users were after. Sometimes they would just give up. Often they would seek help from the library support staff out of frustration.

Helping users navigate the search process made up a substantial portion of all the requests the library received.

“We had a lot of queries where we had to guide people through the software. Often it’s confusion around which publisher platform to use, especially off campus. We’d have to guide them through the login process and literally tell them where they have to click,” Tim, who is the library’s Electronic Resources Coordinator, said.

“It was frustrating to hear the process the student or the academic had to go through to do something as simple as read an article for their research.”

Tim O’Neill

Tim and his colleagues knew that the user experience was important. It influenced the reputation of the library, affecting whether people even used the library to begin with or instead turned to other sources like Google Scholar and SciHub. They were keen to make improvements.
Solving the problem

In support of that effort they hired an outside consulting group to analyze their tools and systems and make suggestions on how they could make things better for users.

As Tim said, “The Google user experience is a simple search box that often results in a single click to get what you want. Scihub is similar. We want to bridge the gap and give a better experience. And by better experience I mean, connect the user to what they want with fewer steps and in less time.”

LibKey’s role in improving the user experience

As part of their efforts the library adopted LibKey Discovery from Third Iron. LibKey Discovery organically adds one-click PDF links directly into leading discovery services helping users get to their desired resources as quickly and intuitively as possible.

“LibKey was clearly an improvement on the user experience because it took out a lot of the steps involved,” Tim said.

“‘It’s so much clearer and so much better that people are asking, ‘Why isn’t it this way to begin with?’’”

Tim O’Neill

LibKey led to 75% fewer clicks

Finding the user’s desired resource was streamlined with LibKey. In fact, the average number of clicks to get to the desired resource after the University of Manchester Library adopted LibKey dropped from 4 to 1.
LibKey led to large time savings

The reduced number of clicks were the result of sparing users the confusion of navigating different screens and being sent to different websites. And this saved time. Lots of time.

“The time saving element was something I looked into. I did a quick and dirty comparison of the time it would take to get an article before LibKey integration versus the time it would take after. I took the average number of clicks—four versus one after the LibKey integration was in place. I compared one month’s stats with the same month a year later. Judging from those stats I estimate that it would be over one hundred days of saved time across everybody accessing content at the university.”

“A user’s most important goal is always to retain her human dignity: not to feel stupid. ... We make the user feel stupid if we let her make big mistakes, keep her from getting an adequate amount of work done, or bore her. Don’t make the user feel stupid.”

Alan Cooper, About Face: The Essentials of Interaction Design

“Negative emotions kick in when there is a lack of understanding, when people feel frustrated and out of control—first uneasiness, then irritation, and if the lack of control and understanding persists, even anger.”

Don Norman, Emotional Design
LibKey helped reduce the number of support tickets

The library measured a three month period prior to implementing LibKey and compared support ticket volume on the Electronic Resources Helpdesk with the same three month period following the LibKey integration.

That particular helpdesk handles an average of 3,000 enquiries in a year. They found support tickets dropped by 25%, or roughly 750 tickets.

“LibKey was a contributor in that decrease,” Tim explained.

Moreover, Tim described a qualitative change in the nature of support requests: fewer people were requesting help navigating library systems. This in turn freed up librarian time to help with more substantive researcher questions.

Results

Implementing LibKey in their discovery service helped the University of Manchester meet their new user experience goals.

Across the university it saves hundreds of days of time spent on essentially non-productive tasks, letting their users spend time on larger and more important tasks.

It allows users to get to their desired content with less confusion and frustration.

And LibKey is helping to reduce the amount of time library staff spend on addressing user navigation questions and increasing the time spent supporting research.

Ready to improve outcomes at your library?

Contact info@thirdiron.com to learn how.