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# Why I don't use the library

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## ABSTRACT

I am a user.  I was your user. Now I am just a user - of information. You never see me, you never hear from me, yet I am there. Am I there because of you, or am I there in spite of you? I am a rated researcher.  I am a prolific supervisor of postgraduate students. I am a contemporary academic. Yet you never see me in the library.  It is because of you - but are you to be thanked, or to be blamed?

This talk will take a light-hearted look at the way in which contemporary information users find, process and produce information. It will give the audience a perspective of the processes through which these users go, rather than to present a list of tools that they use.  Finally the presentation will provide a useful framework to be used by post-graduate students in their initial engagement with the literature. From this the presentation will speculate on the role of the librarian or information specialist in a technology-rich environment.

## INTRODUCTION

It was at the 2001 IATUL conference in Delft, Netherlands, that I shared a paper with Proff Hans Boon and Theo Bothma of the University of Pretoria, in which Hans Boon wrote "The shift in the role of the librarian then is from knowledge of the collection, to knowledge of the users" (Boon, Bothma & Cronje, 2001). From my experience of the University of Pretoria library over the years, as well as the library of the University of Cape Town, and the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, it has become clear that Hans's words have not gone unnoticed. User-centred librarianship is alive and well in South Africa. Furthermore the use of bibliometrics and big data has meant that we are getting to know more and more about those users. And the information gained is being fed back into the system to improve the service.

Of course, herein lies the problem. As we gain more information about our users, so we design better solutions for them, and, as 45 500 *Google* results tell us, "Good design is invisible" (Google, 2013). Thus, even though we know the users it would seem that our aim is ultimately to ensure that the users don't know us. As librarians get better at solving problems for users even before they appear, so users' need to approach librarians is diminishing. I am such a user.  I have lost completely the need to visit a library – either physically or virtually.  I don't even have a username and password for my University library – and yet I am regarded as an academic worth listening to – given that I have been asked to present this talk.  So instead of talking too much, let me take you with me on a journey to the places where I go instead of going to the library.  I hope that those of you who are at the moment so thoroughly engaged in your screens, be they laptop, BlackBerry, IoS or Android, are doing so to follow along on the Web, and not just to catch up on your email.

I am the supervisor of a number of doctoral students from all over the world.  To do so I have started a mOOC. No, not a Mooc, a mOOC.  The Mooc, you know, is a "Massive Open Online Course".  Mine is a "mini Open Online Course".  I am going to take you on a journey through my course and show you the sort of stuff I do, and you'll see why I find it easier to Google than to go to the library.  Interesting, although libraries have been around for thousands of years, there still is no verb for Library – but there is for Google.

## ASK GOOGLE

It was Heila Pienaar of the University of Pretoria who first introduced me to the clean white screen with the white search bar – after my previous way of getting information was to "Ask Jeeves" (2013).

So let's begin our journey to my doctoral programme with Google. You do it.  This is the first exercise.  Find my doctoral programme on Google. So you type in "Free doctoral programme" and you get lots, but they're not mine. Then you type in "Johannes Cronje free doctoral programme" and you get to my page, (Cronje, 2013), but you are still one click away from the actual programme.  So, you still need to hone your information retrieval skills a little.

What you will notice is that it is a Google site. I made it myself and it is free.  The URL is quite difficult to remember, but Google makes it very easy to find it.  Behind the site I have my Gmail account, my Google Drive

account, my Google Analytics account and my Google Calendar. I also use Google groups and Google Hangouts.  I am a cyber citizen.  When I start supervising students I ask them to do the same. Google provides an easy, intuitive and free platform for instant collaboration that is independent of any particular institution.

**THEN GET STARTED**

The key to effective supervision is to ensure that the student does the work – but the important thing is to ensure that the student does the correct work, efficiently, and effectively. So it is important that the student quickly gets a solid grip on the field.  So I send them directly to the fount of all wisdom. *Wikipedia*. Let's go there quickly. Search for Doctoral Supervision. Ok, not a very good site, but it contains everything that I want you to see.  The first thing I show a doctoral student is how to cite a *Wikipedia* entry. Then I encourage them not to cite *Wikipedia.* Instead, I suggest that they consult the references at the bottom of the page.  And this is where the search will start.

Once the students have gained an overview of the field I ask them to find out who the key players in the field are.  For this we use Harzing's (2007) *Publish or perish* free downloadable software. Harzing easily helps them find the most cited authors and the most cited journals available to *Google Scholar*.  Then I ask them to find the five most cited articles from the five most cited authors in the five most cited journals. Now I know you have platforms that do that. I also know that your university spends a fortune on acquiring those platforms.  All I am saying is that I can get most of it for free – and more quickly.

Once they have those articles, I get them to copy all the abstracts into one large document and to paste that document into *Wordle.net* to obtain a "word cloud" visualisation of their envisaged field. From the word cloud they then select relevant keywords to use in future literature searches.

**A LITTLE HELP FROM YOUR FRIENDS**

So once students start downloading articles from *Google Scholar* they need to manage them somehow.  I usually suggest that they use a combination of *Mendeley* and *Zotero.* Mendeley is very useful for keeping .Pdf documents together, and Zotero for .HTML. Both integrate seamlessly with word processing software and both are Web.02-enabled. I also encourage students to join *Researchgate.net* and *Academia.edu* and to follow the most-cited authors that they have discovered. I also encourage them to read the blogs and follow the *Twitter* feeds of such authors, and even to make friends with them on Facebook.  The key here is that the community of scholars has crossed international boundaries and live multiple lives. They are out there, and, by definition, as academics, they have a consuming need to be heard.

I don't teach my students how to use any of these software packages or websites. That's what *Youtube* is there for. Somewhere someone has taken the trouble to develop a set of instructions, and to make it available *for free.*

Once the students have a good grip of who's who in the field, it becomes necessary for them to find out who's saying what in the field.  And this is where we start making clusters.  Clusters are spreadsheets that contain the citations, keywords and abstracts of articles, together with the research questions that they ask, the answers to those questions and the recommendations for further research.  Students then cluster these into categories and finally sort them in order of how appealing these clusters are to themselves.

If you have been at all awake until now you will have noticed that, up to this stage, it has not been necessary for the students to read a single article yet.  But wait, there's more...

**A LITTLE TOOL**

One of the key problems that students have is with the writing of a good literature survey. The main problem is one of making sense of all that data - and what better tool for them to use to make sense of all this data than a spreadsheet.  What we do, is to build onto the spreadsheet that the students have developed and to populate it further with quotes or summaries of the most significant messages of each particular article.

Once the quotes and summaries have been entered, complete with page numbers and all the other bibliographical details, we identify them with keywords, sort them under the keywords, and then arrange them in order of importance. Then a simple mail merge operation will generate the first draft of the literature survey.

**CONCLUSION**

You will notice that this demonstration has shown how tools and resources that are available completely for free on the Internet can be used to get a doctoral student from a seminal idea all the way to a defendable research proposal.

I would argue that it is quite possible, along the same lines, to go all the way to the completed research project.  It is also quite clear that students can go a long way without actually using any formal library structure.

What is needed now is that the current degree of standardisation and be exploited and advanced so that the various tools and resources I have shown can be combined into one large automated doctoral dissertation generator.

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