Top university in Australia enhances user experience and maximises security with OpenAthens
University of Melbourne

Overview

The University of Melbourne is Australia's leading research university, offering undergraduate and graduate degree programs in the arts, sciences and professional disciplines. In 2020 it was ranked the No. 1 University in Australia and No. 32 in the world by the Times Higher Education's World University Rankings.

With more than 12,000 academic and professional staff and 52,000 students, the University has a large program of research, teaching and learning. To support the research needs of students and faculty, the University of Melbourne Library offers a diverse collection of more than 3.5 million physical items, 180,000 e-journals and 2.5 million e-books. The Library holds many collections of rare books, ancient maps, prints and other unique collections.

Challenges

Delivering a good user experience for students, academics and researchers is at the heart of the University of Melbourne Library. A well-established user of **EBSCO Discovery Service (EDS)**, the Library had successfully customised the interface to meet the needs of its diverse user base. Inventive approaches keep resources accessible for all users, including embedded discovery search boxes in both the student portal and LMS (learning management system).

According to Discovery Manager Caroline Gauld, delivering a good user experience must also include careful attention to the issue of data privacy for users. For many years, the University Library used an IP-based proxy service to facilitate off-campus access for students and faculty. This solution provided researchers and students with anonymity but did not make it easy for them to use the valuable personalisation features now available in many online platforms. Even before the COVID-19 impacted campus attendance, at least 70 percent of the Library's online content was accessed from off-campus, making IP-based access less important than it had been in the past.

The IP-based proxy service was more susceptible to security issues, but as it was managed by the central University IT team, responding to security issues was time-consuming and difficult for library staff. "[Managing security breaches] was not a good use of library staff time," Gauld said. "We are here to provide access to resources to people. Our time should be spent in letting people know what the Library has and helping them to get into it."

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Solutions

To improve the user experience and reduce security issues, the University of Melbourne Library implemented **OpenAthens** in March 2020 with EBSCO support. Since OpenAthens is underlying technology, the University made no large announcement to users because the experience was seamless. OpenAthens enabled access to more than 530 vendor sites on launch, many of them by single sign-on.

By May, the University of Melbourne had already become OpenAthens' largest global user. In that month alone, 700,000 resources were accessed across 117 countries with the highest international usage seen in Singapore, China, New Zealand, Indonesia, Hong Kong and India.

Such a rapid pace from implementation to success is no easy feat, but "considering we're quite a complex university, I think if we can do it, anyone can," Gauld said.

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> The EBSCO team were fantastic; they had our resources and connections set up and working in just a few months and responded rapidly to any issues.

Caroline Gauld | Manager of Discovery and Library Systems | University of Melbourne
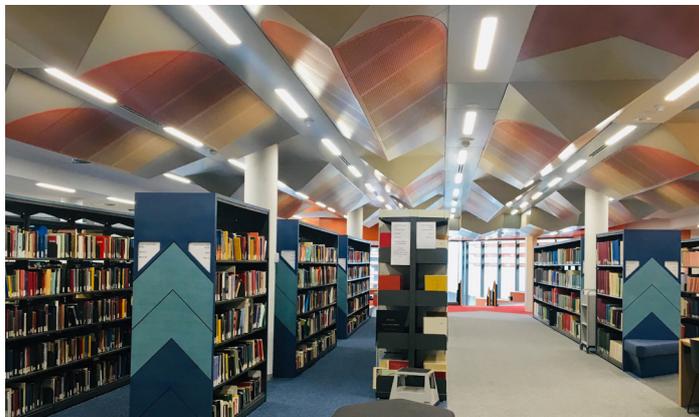
Benefits and Results

Students and staff using EDS benefited straight away, with increased sharing of resources and more items saved into EDS folders. But even before the switchover of EDS from the proxy to OpenAthens, thousands of students and staff had found and used the OpenAthens Institutional login available on some publisher sites.

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Since implementing OpenAthens, the time spent on security incidents has dropped dramatically, and library staff can handle each case in real time using the OpenAthens Administration portal.

"It's reduced our workload and it's made things smoother," Gauld explained. "We're not doing the license breach monitoring. We don't have those service notes coming in for broken logins or things. I just think things are working really well."

The Library maintains a small amount of traffic through the IP-based proxy service but are moving toward all users accessing resources via OpenAthens.

"Once we do shut [the proxy service] down, we will rely a lot less on the central IT team," Gauld said. "More importantly, we'll have control ourselves. OpenAthens allows us to separate out the authentication, the access, and the authorisation. So, the access and authorisation still sit with us and our vendor. Authentication sits with IT."

Looking Ahead

Gauld said the Library will eventually move their alumni resource access to OpenAthens and then create support for members of the public who walk in to use the Library. Once the proxy service is shut down, the Library will communicate with all vendors and encourage them to support OpenAthens single sign-on.

"I really would like to see single sign-on as much as possible, provided we can offer single sign-on that is privacy-preserving to our academics," Gauld explained. "I think that that's a much better experience, and it's much more secure. And it means that they can effectively take control of their environment."

The University of Melbourne Library has also become an EBSCO beta tester and is following the Open Source **FOLIO** initiative closely.

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https://www.ebsco.com/products/ebsco-openathens

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