

SHARING KNOWLEDGE: RECENT TRENDS IN SEARCH AND DELIVERY TOOLS FOR SCHOLARLY CONTENT

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The current buzzwords in electronic information delivery begin with the word “open”: open source, open content, open standards, open access, open archives. The trend towards making content and resources available on the Internet is spreading quickly throughout the academic world. The issues surrounding free and open access are complex and deserve to be studied. But learning about these issues and familiarizing themselves with new Web technologies can involve scholars and researchers in making their intellectual and creative output available to a wider audience. New and mostly free Web-based searching tools and services are providing access to and delivery of scholarly and research materials. These include open content repositories, search engines, weblogs and news services, and RSS (“rich simple syndication” or “rich site summary”) technology. Partnerships to open up new channels of distribution of scholarly content are forming among the major software engine developers, publishers, universities and other research institutions, and among scholars. Although the impact of these developments on the Jewish

studies community may be minimal, it is growing every day.

The movement to put peer-reviewed and scholarly materials on the Internet and make them available free of charge has existed since the early 1990s and is gaining momentum in the humanities and social sciences. Institutions create digital repositories to archive and

AS MEMBERS OF THE JEWISH STUDIES SCHOLARLY COMMUNITY, WE ARE IN THE BEST POSITION TO DETERMINE THE VALUE AND USEFULNESS OF THESE TOOLS. WE MUST TAKE THE INITIATIVE AND FAMILIARIZE OURSELVES WITH NEW WEB-BASED TECHNOLOGIES AND SERVICES.

disseminate scholarly output from across many fields. Open access e-archives are usually community-driven and contain output from one or many scholarly disciplines. American scholars experience difficulties in accessing Israeli dissertations in Jewish studies. Israeli doctoral students do not routinely submit dissertations to ProQuest/UMI, nor do Israeli universities provide a central depository for electronic copies of these works.¹ Jewish studies scholars internationally would benefit from the creation of an electronic repository into which authors can self-archive and make available their output. Israel Scholar Works is a

new initiative that seeks to serve as a “digital archive for creative work by the faculty and staff of Israel Academic Institutions and Jewish scholars all around the world.”²

Google Scholar is a free Web service that lets users search the content and citations in proprietary electronic journals and online repositories of scholarly papers via the popular Google search engine technology.³ Through it one can search for and link to the full text of articles, identify books, and locate a nearby library containing a copy. An important feature of Google Scholar is that if the item being looked at is freely available on the Web, the user can directly access it. Otherwise, one is taken to the vendor’s Web site in which case access must either be purchased or made via proxy. Google does not explain how it decides what to include in Google Scholar nor does it provide date ranges covered. There is no list of commercial or open access publishers, preprint and reprint servers, or abstracting/indexing databases. As a result, it is hard

to gauge Google Scholar’s current usefulness to the Jewish studies research community. Even the most experienced searchers have difficulty trying to determine the depth of coverage for a particular discipline. Google Scholar is very rich in content for the sciences which produce many nontraditional forms of scholarly output, and it includes citations from IEEE (Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers) and ACM (Association for Computing Machinery) publications, HighWire Press, and PubMed.⁴ Google Scholar searches collections of academic and research articles and citation data that serve Jewish studies such as



Screenshot of www.israelscholar.org. Courtesy of Israel Scholar Works.

IngentaConnect and Project Muse, but many archives and subject-specific indexes appear to be excluded. A recent Google Scholar search by publication for articles appearing in *Shofar* between 2000 and 2005 yielded 711 citations; a similar search for *Jewish Social Studies* for the same period yielded 123 citations; and for *Prooftexts* only 11 citations. Journals that are included in Project Muse clearly are not cited equally in Google Scholar.⁵

In 2004 Google announced that it was going to digitize millions of books from five major research libraries via Google Book Search (formerly Google Print). This program also enables users to search full texts of public domain and copyright protected books online.⁶ Full-text access is provided to the rapidly increasing number of public domain books, while only excerpts and snippets of books under copyright are offered through Google Book Search. Most of these books are in English, but Google is scanning and accepting books for this service in other languages.⁷ Google wants to expand its book offerings to include non-roman script materials and with Stanford University is initiating an international collaborative project to digitize Arabic books.⁸ The Open Content Alliance (OCA) is a consortium of libraries, archives, and publishers that aims to create a

“permanent archive of multilingual digitized text and multimedia content.” This project differs from the Google initiatives in that content will be available for anyone to use free of charge, and the full text will be searchable by many search engines. Internet Archive and Yahoo started this project, and

Microsoft, the University of California, and the California Digital Library joined very soon thereafter. More than forty “cultural, technology, nonprofit and governmental organizations” have now committed to participation in the OCA. Participants must obtain permission of all the relevant copyright holders prior to contributing materials to the project.⁹

A relatively new phenomenon in electronic delivery of information is self-publishing or “social publishing” in which individuals or small groups create the content and make it available. The weblog (blog) is the most popular format. Journalists, politicians, and hi-tech professionals have used blogs for several years to publish their personal thoughts and observations. Generally, blogs consist of brief entries arranged in reverse chronological order. The most recent entry appears first. These postings are updated frequently and regularly. People who peruse blogs are usually able to post comments as well. The writing style is mostly informal. A blog that is known to be reliable may have a

large audience and can be a very effective tool for spreading and disseminating ideas and information.

Scholars in Jewish studies have been slow to blog but activity is growing. Dr. Deborah Lipstadt (Emory University) maintains a blog that includes links to her articles, along with Web sites and postings that are relevant to her recent book, *History on Trial*. Although Dr. Lipstadt started her blog “as a lark,” she now believes that it is a “useful tool” and is “very efficacious for commenting on contemporary events which pertain to my scholarly and intellectual interests [most particularly current anti-Semitism and especially Holocaust denial].” By the beginning of January 2006, Dr. Lipstadt’s weblog had received more than 31,000 visitors since its inception nearly a year earlier.¹⁰ Blogs have entered biblical studies where they have become popular forums for discussing the latest developments,



Screenshot of scholar.google.com. Courtesy of Google.

and interacting about controversial topics. PaleoJudaica.com, maintained by Dr. James Davila, is a weblog “that aims to chronicle and comment on current developments ... in the academic field of ancient Judaism and its historical and literary context.”¹¹ Scholars often discover that blogs are an excellent way to share research and other information with their colleagues and other communities.

RSS is a technology that lets users access blogs, electronic news sources, and Web sites without having to wade through multiple sites one at a time. An RSS feed can provide updated lists of headlines and articles that users subscribe to and read, using a “feed reader” or “aggregator.” There are too many kinds of Web sites that have RSS feeds to generalize about the types of sites that offer this service, but they range from the personal to the scholarly. At some academic libraries, faculty, staff, and students can subscribe to RSS feeds of new library book acquisitions as they enter their library catalogs. These feeds are available for books in a variety of subject areas, which are very often based on the Library of Congress classification system. The University of Alabama Library offers 325 subject feeds including BM (Judaism), DS (History; Asia [including Israel]), KB (Religious law [including Jewish law]), and PJ (Oriental languages and literatures [including Hebrew and Yiddish])¹² University presses offer RSS as a tool for informing scholars when new books are published. Journal publishers use RSS to keep

readers up-to-date with their latest journal content.

As members of the Jewish studies scholarly community, we are in the best position to determine the value and usefulness of these tools. We must take the initiative and familiarize ourselves with new Web-based technologies and services. This will enable us, individually and collaboratively, to expand the presence of easily accessible primary and secondary scholarly and research materials in the digital world.

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¹ Although there is no central service for obtaining print or electronic copies, bibliographical records for Israeli theses and dissertations are available as a subset of the Israel Union Catalog, http://aleph1.libnet.ac.il/E/?func=file&file_name=find-b&local_base=uli02&con_lng=eng (accessed January 21, 2006).

² Israel Scholar Works Web site, <http://israelscholar.org> (accessed January 21, 2006).

³ Google Scholar Web site, <http://scholar.google.com> (accessed January 21, 2006).

⁴ Engineering Library News [Stanford University Library], Fall Quarter, 2005, <http://www-sul.stanford.edu/depts/eng/highlights/englibnewsfall05.pdf> (accessed January 21, 2006).

⁵ Google Scholar Web site, Advanced Scholar Search, http://scholar.google.com/advanced_scholar_search?hl=en&lr= (searched January 21, 2006); Project Muse Scholarly journals online Web site, <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals> (accessed January 21, 2006).

⁶ Google Book Search Web site, <http://books.google.com> (accessed January 21, 2006).

⁷ Google Book Search, Common questions Web site, <http://books.google.com/googlebooks/common.html#9> (accessed January 21, 2006); Google Book Search Frequently Asked Questions, http://books.google.com/support/partner/bin/index.py?fulldump=1&hl=en_US#17861 (accessed January 21, 2006).

⁸ Bibliotheca Alexandrina, International School of Information Science (ISIS) Web site, <http://www.bibalex.org/isis/Home.aspx> (accessed January 21, 2006).

⁹ Open Content Alliance Web site, <http://www.opencontentalliance.org> (accessed January 21, 2006).

¹⁰ Dr. Deborah Lipstadt, “Blogs and Jewish Studies,” December 22, 2005; January 21, 2006, personal e-mail (January 21, 2006).

¹¹ PaleoJudaica.com Web site, <http://paleojudaica.blogspot.com> (accessed January 21, 2006).

¹² University of Alabama, University Libraries, RSS Feeds for Recently Cataloged Titles Web site, <http://library.ua.edu/rss> (accessed January 21, 2006).

WOMEN'S CAUCUS TRAVEL GRANTS FOR INDEPENDENT SCHOLARS AND GRADUATE STUDENTS

The AJS Womens Caucus awards travel grants to graduate students and independent scholars whose papers have been accepted at the 2006 conference, and which contribute to the study of women, feminism, and gender in Jewish studies. Paper topics in all areas of Jewish studies are welcome. The application consists of: the paper title and the AJS abstract/paper proposal; a copy of the letter of acceptance from the AJS; your c.v.; and a proposed budget that includes other sources of financial support. Applications should be postmarked by September 16, 2006. Two copies of all materials should be sent to: Professor Gail Laibovitz, The University of Judaism, 15600 Mulholland Drive, Bel-Air, Ca. 90077.

Womens Caucus award winners will be announced at the Womens Caucus Breakfast.