Chapter 6

Possible Future Trends

Looking to the future, we can anticipate some trends to develop in the academic library discovery arena based on some of the industry dynamics underway now. These trends might include the following:

- Continued movement of academic libraries away from integrated library systems and increased adoption of library services platforms. This movement will come with increased pairing of components from the same vendor.
- The entry of FOLIO will introduce a third library services platform, which in most cases will be paired with EBSCO Discovery Service.
- The current slate of discovery services will mostly remain intact. We can expect OCLC to fully consolidate WorldCat Local with WorldCat Discovery Service. Ex Libris may consolidate indexes and technical infrastructure for Summon and Primo but continue both interfaces indefinitely.
- It is highly unlikely that an open access discovery index will be created with the same scope as the current commercial offerings. The financial investment and intense levels of operational support required will continue to exceed the practical thresholds of a community-supported project. As long as multiple commercial competitors remain, the benefits of an open access discovery index and corresponding interfaces will be limited. These dynamics could change should the existing products decline in quality or business strategies shift from the current relatively open environment to one that forces libraries into single-vendor content and technology ecosystems. These scenarios seem improbable given current market trends in both the content and technology sectors.
- Discovery indexes will continue to expand, and gaps in coverage will diminish. Both through increased cooperation between content providers with discovery services and through more effective indexing of content covered in aggregated databases, index-based discovery services will eventually come quite close to comprehensive coverage of the professional and scholarly literature of interest to libraries.
- Machine learning and other forms of artificial intelligence will increase their impact on discovery services. Currently products such as Yewno Discovery take advantage of concept extraction and machine learning to address the literature in specific scholarly disciplines. This product has been implemented by a growing number of libraries as a supplementary discovery tool for some categories of users.[1] This product demonstrates the applicability of these technologies to library discovery. Existing index-based discovery products may eventually adopt artificial intelligence technologies to replace or supplement the capabilities possible through traditional indexing.

These trends point to continuity or at least incremental change in the academic library discovery services environment in the next five years or so. This product genre can be considered as reasonably mature in features and content coverage and is approaching saturation among large and midsized US academic libraries and other market sectors. Market opportunities remain, especially in other geographic regions, in smaller academic libraries, and among nonacademic libraries. Libraries can expect incremental innovation among these products, with any real breakthroughs more likely to take place in other areas of library

technology. Discovery services will continue as an essential component of a library's technical infrastructure, and current market dynamics point to an ongoing vigorous competition among a limited number of players. The competition may not center on these products directly, but they will continue to be an important component of broader product offerings.

Note

1. Marshall Breeding, "Yewno Advances as a New Type of Discovery," *Smart Libraries Newsletter* 37, no. 4 (April 2017): 2–5.