

TechMatters: Search Us! : Staking a Claim to the Browser Search Box

Krista Graham, Central Michigan University

As every instruction librarian knows, students love to start their research using their favorite search engine. Promoting this approach are the two prominent browsers, Internet Explorer and Firefox, both of which feature built-in search boxes in the upper right-hand corner pre-configured to allow direct searching of a variety of popular web search tools such as Google and Yahoo. Wouldn't it be great if one of those search tools was your library catalog? Or maybe your federated search tool? Well, it can be, and the good news is that it's not that hard to create, and then promote, a browser search option like this for your users.

Getting Started:

If you want to experiment with creating a custom browser search box for your catalog, the easiest way to get started is with Internet Explorer. In fact, IE7 provides an easy to access tool that will help you to generate and install a customized search widget for your catalog. The process is incredibly straightforward. Simply follow these steps:

1. Open your copy of Internet Explorer 7.
2. Click on the arrow located on the right-hand side of the browser search tool. This will generate an options menu.
3. Select **Find More Providers...** from the menu. Doing so will take you to a web page that will provide you with a list of additional sites that you can add to your search options including Amazon, USA Today, Wikipedia, and a variety of others options.
4. In addition, you will find the **Create Your Own** tool (Figure 1). As you will see, all you need to do is perform a TEST search in your catalog, paste the resulting URL into the tool, specify a name for your search tool, and press the **Install** button.

Figure 1:

5. At this point, your catalog search tool should be available in the drop-down list of search options. If you want to set your catalog as the default, simply select **Change Search Defaults...**, choose your catalog from the list of **Search Providers**, and press **Set Default**.

Sharing Your Search Tool

The instructions provided above will, of course, only place your customized search tool in exactly one location - your local browser. To make the tool available for installation by all of your users, all you need is a text editor, access to a web server, and the ability to make a few minor modifications to a web page.

1. Starting with the IE **Create Your Own** search tool, fill in the required information and then click on the link to **View XML**.
2. Copy and paste the code that you receive into your text editor, and save as an .xml file.
3. Place a copy of this file on your web server.

4. In order to provide your users with the option of adding your tool to their drop down list of search engines, you need add a <LINK> element to the <HEAD> section of each web page from which you want to provide this option. Here's a sample of what the link tag should look like:

```
<link title="Tool Name" rel="search" type="application/
opensearchdescription+xml" href="http://
my.web.site.domain/filename.xml" />
```

5. Now, when users navigate to your web page, the drop down arrow to the right or left of the search box should glow to indicate that a new search tool is available. To add this tool, users may now simply select **Add Search Providers** from the drop down menu, select your search tool, and as easy as that they now have the option to search your catalog directly from the browser search box.

Promoting Your Search Tool

Having created and made this new browser search option available, the next step is to promote it to your students and faculty. A good starting point for this effort is the creation of an instructional web page to promote the tool and guide users through the simple steps required for installation. A page like this is important, because having a tool like this created and then installed on the library computers' browsers won't mean much if students don't know how to easily install the tool on their own computers – few students solely use the library's computers for research. Here are two good examples of such marketing/help pages:

- a. *Royal Children's Hospital – Melbourne, Australia*
<http://www.rch.org.au/library/search/>

The page provides a brief description of the library "search plugins" available, and then gives brief illustrated explanations for installing the catalog search tool for each of the major browser versions.

- b. *DePauw University*
<http://www.depauw.edu/library/find/guides/researchguides/firefoxSearches.asp>

On this page, the DePauw University Library promotes not only their local catalog search tool, but also tools to search a variety of other reference and article databases. They do so by providing links to the "Search Engine Plugins" list on the Mozilla (aka Firefox) development page (<http://mycroft.mozdev.org>).

Adding Your Tool to the Mozilla Directory

Submitting your search tool to Mozilla's Mycroft developers' site, [<http://mycroft.mozdev.org/install.html>], is another good way to promote your search tool. On this site, you will find a search tool that users may use to locate search provider plug-ins that have been submitted to the directory. To see a list of all library search tools, simply choose **Education ... Libraries** from the **Site category** drop down menu and then **Search**. From here users simply click on each search tool link to add new search options to their browser.

Adding your search tool to this list is a simple matter of filling out the **Submission Utility** form available at <http://mycroft.mozdev.org/submitos.html>. This form actually generates the necessary .xml file and submits it to the directory. The great thing is that the submission utility generates a file that is standards compliant, which means the resulting links can be used to install your tool in both Firefox and Internet Explorer browsers.

Having reclaimed the browser search tool, your final step is to use it to lure students back to the library catalog and other research databases. Even though the search interface is not as robust as those available in library databases, if giving students access to a search interface they find familiar encourages them to start their search in the library then I will consider that a small battle won! As an instructor, I can then focus my efforts on teaching them how to use the more advanced features of library tools to refine and improve their search results.