EDINA releases a new look SUNCAT

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EDINA introduced a new look SUNCAT, the national Serials Union CATalogue for the UK research community, http://service.suncat.ac.uk , at the end of October 2013.

SUNCAT contains information about the serials holdings of over 90 libraries across the UK and Ireland. Contributing institutions include the British Library, the National Libraries of Scotland and Wales, the largest UK higher education libraries and a range of specialist libraries such as the National Art Library and the Royal Society of Medicine.

The impetus to redevelop the service emerged from user suggestions gathered via interviews and online surveys over the past few years, alongside the desire to create a contemporary interface for the service.

The original SUNCAT service (http://www.suncat.ac.uk) currently runs on Aleph 500 software, but to enable maximum flexibility for both the functionality and the presentation of the service, EDINA decided to create the new web interface with the open source search platform, Solr. Having considered a number of options, EDINA found Solr to be the best solution for dealing with the complex issues around searching and displaying records grouped into matched sets, a central component of SUNCAT. However, in this initial phase of development SUNCAT will continue to use the Aleph software to load and de-duplicate contributing libraries' serials records.

The first step in the redevelopment was to ensure that the Solr service replicated the basic functionality of the existing service. While this work was ongoing, a wish list of features based on user feedback and a survey of some of the best functionality available in commercial search engines, library and union catalogues in the UK, Europe and beyond, was identified. These features were then prioritised for releases across three phases of development.

Previous user feedback also informed the design brief for the redeveloped service. Having considered a number of designs, EDINA narrowed the selection down to a few favoured options before consulting with SUNCAT contributing institutions to decide on the final design.

A beta version of the new platform was made available for a few weeks in spring 2013, during which time feedback was again gathered and analysed to inform the ongoing development work. The feedback was largely very positive and EDINA was already aware of any significant issues raised.

One of the key features of the new service is the ability to limit searches by institution or by location, at country, region or town / city level. Multiple institutions and locations can be selected and combined, giving users a great deal of control over their searches. The limits now also ensure that users see only the holdings from locations or institutions they are interested in, as any extraneous holdings are no longer displayed.

The improvements to the functionality of the limits means that in the future EDINA hope to allow for customised views onto the service, configurable at the individual user level, and also at a higher consortial level. In effect, it should be possible to establish pre-set views or mini union catalogues for consortia working in geographic, strategic or subject groups, e.g. libraries in north west England, UK Research Reserve members or NHS libraries in the Midlands.
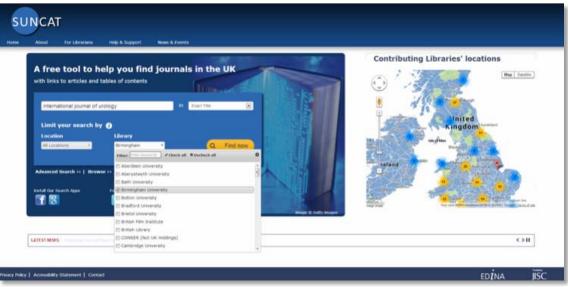
Some of the other key features of the new service include:

- The ability to limit searching to electronic or print serials only: helpful for those who want to see what might be immediately available online or, conversely, for those who want to see only material likely to be available via inter-library loan (ILL).
- Post-search filtering of results by institution, subject, format, author, publisher, date, etc.
- Information about each contributing institution, including Google map directions, contact details, British Library ILL codes, and when the institution's holdings were last updated in SUNCAT.

The new interface will run in parallel with the existing Aleph service for approximately six months after the launch in autumn 2013. It will then become the formal service, but development work will continue as there are further features to be added. Some of these include:

- An increase in the number of table of contents (ToCs) links available on SUNCAT. To supplement the links already available to the Zetoc service, links will be added to the JournalToCs service, so that more of the journal titles on SUNCAT will have ToCs links.

- A mobile app which will enable users to search SUNCAT on the move and find serials held closest to their current location
- A SUNCAT API will be made freely available to allow the querying and retrieval of records in a variety of metadata formats, including Dublin Core and MODS.

More detailed information about the redevelopment is available on the SUNCAT Blog http://suncat.blogs.edina.ac.uk/ or by contacting the EDINA helpdesk edina@ed.ac.uk

Limiting a search by institution on the new-look SUNCAT service