New technologies and methods of knowledge transfer by many accounts have eclipsed the traditional concept of “collection” and the associated methods of discovery and delivery. The use of electronic databases has exploded, meaning there is less need for these resources to be directly managed by the library. As a result, at many libraries the focus of librarianship has shifted from managing collections to the user experience. As resources move to the Web and libraries experiment with “going bookless,” it is more important than ever that the library act as facilitator, as mentor, and as partner to searchers and users—regardless of where the information they need is housed.

Meanwhile, circulation is steady or rising at most academic libraries; and, at public libraries, both circulation and holds-placed are rising. The catalog is as vital as ever to many users even as they embrace Web information for news and research. Balancing the two, ensuring users are always matched with the right resource for their need—and that they don’t get lost in the vastness of information available online—is a critical component of the Library’s role.

As a result of these challenges, new discovery options have emerged. These discovery platforms began as improved finding tools, “next generation catalogs,” but now they have to be much more: tools for library mentoring, Web destinations, bridges to online article resources, and forums for discussion and the exchange of ideas between libraries and users. Content may be increasingly online, but discovery still “lives” at the library. Now more than ever, a library is a place where knowledge and ideas are transferred and exchanged and librarians are the mediators of this process. The Encore discovery services platform is expanding in scope to meet this need in a number of exciting ways.

Our goal is to ensure that this new discovery platform technology provides one search of the whole library.

Encore has been designed on the principle that users should have a single search box which discovers all types of information offered by the library. Articles are a key component of the information libraries offer, from scholarly research sources, which command the majority of academic library budgets, to the up-to-the-minute news sources available to public library patrons.

With Encore Synergy, Encore’s architecture has been extended to fully integrate next-generation article discovery technology. Users
are seamlessly presented with an article “preview” and can move effortlessly between the local collection discovery mode to the article mode, and back again. The user interface is familiar to Encore users but now applied to article searching, with provider-supplied relevance optimized for the article data and facets such as full-text and peer reviewed.

Encore Synergy enhances the database provider’s discovery tools with local library features, such as the tag cloud and Did You Mean? features derived from local indexing. The library’s unique, mission-specific metadata continues to offer guidance and search pathways through the ocean of Web information.

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Library Empowerment
A successful discovery platform must leverage the expertise of the library to guide and educate users in the successful navigation of all types of information sources. Online sources require librarian guidance in many of the same ways as local collections do.

In addition to applying locally derived mentoring tools mentioned earlier, Encore now offers additional tools for library staff to guide their users’ discovery experience. The new “promote” feature adds a whole new dimension to Innovative’s RightResult™ relevance algorithm, allowing authorized staff to selectively promote specific titles to the top of any results set. Promotions may be removed after a time period or left in place indefinitely and any item (of any type) in the collection may be promoted. Librarians are embracing the tagging features built into Encore’s community module, allowing them to supplement the findability of the core metadata with a “folksonomy” of more natural language words and phrases. Tags not only enhance discovery of local collections, but also appear as pathways in the Article Discovery mode of Encore Synergy!

Community
Librarians have long identified libraries as far more than just materials on shelves waiting to be found—but as a place, a destination, and a forum for the exchange of ideas. In the same way, a discovery platform should be more than a “finder of things,” but a finder of ideas—not just a set of results, but a virtual place, an online forum. The Web 2.0 proponents outside the library world finally figured out what librarians already knew: discussion as well as discovery makes a fully realized online experience.

Innovative is continuing to enhance Encore’s community forum features, adding to the existing ability to rate, tag or review materials with the new “comments” feature. This feature encourages discussion by allowing users to directly engage each other through interactive comment threads. The library community can now not only enrich the catalog itself, but also engage directly with one another through the moderated medium of the discovery platform—the library online.

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Integration: Beyond Books and Articles
Imagine a bookless library. Imagine all the volumes and DVDs taken from the shelves and sent to storage. What is left? A building with a few Internet stations? Or is there more to it than that? Libraries have always been more than repositories, they are forums for specific activities which support the library’s mission as a place where knowledge and ideas are transferred and exchanged, including the reserve book room, local digital collections, and programs and events such as seminars, guest speakers, panels and more. A discovery platform must integrate these dynamic aspects of a library or else it does not fully reveal the full value of the library in a single search.