

OpenURL Resolver Profile: OL2 from Fretwell-Downing

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OL2 is a value-added component of Fretwell-Downing's ZPortal search and retrieval tool. Version 2.3 of ZPortal/OL2 was recently released. ZPortal is a Z39.50 search engine and web interface for accessing data from combined catalogs of libraries, archives, museums, and other online resources. OL2 works only in conjunction with ZPortal and is not currently sold as a standalone product, although some discussions are underway to offer it separately.

System requirements and functionality

OL2 (as combined with ZPortal) is server based and can be hosted either locally or remotely. The precise setup depends on how the product is being used. For a single institution environment, a single CPU server class machine and a separate box for ORACLE will generally suffice. For a large-scale implementation, such as a consortium, the system would likely work best with a dual CPU server, a separate ORACLE box, and at least one more web server for load balancing. With more detailed information, Fretwell-Downing will work more closely with a participating institution(s) to provide very specific hardware recommendations.

Services Provided

OL2 provides integrated access to online full-text databases, electronic journals, and library catalog records and points users to the most appropriate copy or information provider for their library affiliation. It can be configured to present users with a range of access points, including table of contents, abstract, and full text with format indicators.

The databases and resources with which OL2 works are defined wholly by the customer. Any Z39.50 compliant resource will work, as will many web-based or non-Z39.50 products. The only real necessity is that the resource supplier supports the OpenURL standard. OL2 will work with CrossRef's implementation of DOI without the necessity of the library being a CrossRef member. The installation price includes configuration of the resources specific to a library or consortium. After that, library staff may update the list locally or allow Fretwell-Downing remote access to the database for updates (at an hourly cost).

The default ZPortal search screen presents all options available for a given resource and allows users to select the link type best suited to their own needs. The search and results screens are highly customizable in terms of visual appearance (such as adding a library logo). Some further customization is possible, although it may require some extensive knowledge of XSLT.

Currently, ZPortal logs transactions through the web server. There is currently no front-end access to these statistics. They can be obtained from the server and analyzed through Web-Trends or other third party tools. In future releases (beginning with Version 3.0 at the end of 2003), more direct access should be available through ZPortal.

Setup and Technical Support

The setup of ZPortal/OL2 is monitored by a Fretwell-Downing implementation team, which works closely with local administrators or technicians to configure the system. Training sessions are available for staff and system administrators. Although training for end users has not generally been found to be necessary, it is available if desired.

Depending on the complexity of an institution (or consortium's) needs, installation and configuration of ZPortal can take between two and ten weeks.

Pricing/Cost

The pricing scheme is somewhat complicated and would ultimately depend on how many member libraries purchased the system. A single institution purchase of ZPortal (which includes OL2 at no charge) would start at about \$30,000 and rise based on the FTE for the institution. With additional costs for installation, configuration, training, and maintenance, costs might run up to \$50,000 for the first year and \$6,000 annual maintenance costs after that. In a consortial environment, however, each additional library would only have to pay a one-time fee of \$7500 to have the system configured locally. In addition, a discount could be given on the initial purchase price depending on how many libraries were interested in purchasing the product.

It is possible that, within the next several months, Fretwell-Downing will make the decision to offer OL2 as a standalone product, separate from the ZPortal software. This will require extensive redevelopment of the existing product. If this does occur, the prices for the standalone product should obviously be less than those mentioned above but there is currently no real estimate of how much.

Summary

Currently, OL2 exists primarily as an extension of ZPortal but seems to possess all the resources of the standalone products such as SFX. The question would be (assuming of course that a decision was made to purchase any product) whether or not the ZPortal functions would be worth any additional cost beyond those of a standalone OpenURL product. If the pricing (when spread across the consortium or group of interested libraries) was not significantly higher than other standalone products, the advantages of ZPortal might make the additional price worthwhile. Given current budget considerations, however, it is probably too steep for most libraries. The other possibility is to wait and check on the pricing of an OL2 standalone, if and when it becomes available.