Review of "Colwiz"

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Introduction

Learning is a collaborative conversation between different people and different publications, a reality not always taken into account with linear citation management tools. However, several innovative companies are recognizing and responding to these challenges by developing new platforms that aim to meet changing researcher needs. Colwiz (http://www.colwiz.com/), which stands for "collective wizdom," is one of the newest products. Despite sounding like it might be Harry Potter's trade union, Colwiz is a sophisticated tool that offers "research management, collaboration and productivity in one place."1 Developed at the University of Oxford and released in late 2010, Colwiz has been growing in strength and offers a long-overdue and efficient solution to the often very messy nature of academic, industry, and government research.

What Does it Do?

Firstly, like Mendeley or other citation manager tools, Colwiz will manage citations and PDFs. There are two main ways to start building a library in the desktop client: importing PDFs and documents or searching within databases. When importing documents, Colwiz will automatically try to pull out the citation information from the publication. If it can't recognize the format, it searches Google Scholar and displays the results, which allows for simple citation annotation by hand. Citations can also be added from databases such as PubMed, JSTOR, EBSCO and DOAJ. A "Search Online" button opens up popular databases within the desktop client, allowing researchers full functionality to search their favorite databases from within Colwiz. Citations can then be automatically added from the list of results. If a researcher is off campus or unauthenticated, only citation information can

be imported. The library of citations from the desktop Colwiz client can then be synced with the Web-based version to ensure access to publications from multiple locations or machines. Citations can also be added by hand to the Web-based version, though it cannot process PDFs, documents, or database searches.

So far, this functionality is fairly standard. However, where Colwiz really shines is its integration with other tools that are used in the research process. Recognizing that more and more research is collaborative and part of a process, Colwiz provides access to a suite of impressive productivity tools such as calendars, task lists, and project management resources. The project management feature is especially exciting, allowing researchers to set up shared workspaces ensuring that projects stay on track from start to finish. Discussion groups can also be set up, as well as social-networking-style personal profiles. Originally developed for the scientific community, the Colwiz social networking attributes include several useful features such as being able to easily post polls and publications. (And if you've ever felt stymied by not being able to post an equation directly to your Facebook status, then Colwiz is definitely for you!)

Colwiz also provides numerous analytics features within your personal library. These features can show you the most popular journals and authors within your library, and include several visualization tools that illustrate relationships between authors, papers, and journals. Both the Web and desktop version will also allow you to search for related research, either by author or document. This provides yet another way to build up a collection of citations and documents by drawing on your colleagues' expertise and reading habits.



Logistics

As a fairly new tool, Colwiz seems to have only one level of account, which is currently free. While Colwiz registration was originally limited to UK and US academic email addresses, applications from any organizational email address are now accepted, and researchers from institutions as varied as Samsung, NHS, IBM and the US Department of Energy are using Colwiz.

The Colwiz desktop client runs on Mac, Windows and Linux platforms, and the Web version ensures that data is backed up in the cloud, too. Currently there is no integrated mobile functionality. Data can be imported from RIS, Endnote XML, BibTeX and LaTeX. A small plugin for Microsoft Office or Open Office ensures that citation within documents is also possible.

Analysis

Colwiz is an exciting new tool. Its integration with productivity tools provides an easy way to streamline collaborative research, offering an enhanced platform for companies or groups looking to improve communication and workflow. With registration limited to organizational or academic email addresses, serving groups may be Colwiz's aim. Database integration is impressive, and database searching within the Colwiz platform is effective and easy to use. Finally, the current limitless (and free) storage is also extremely attractive for people with large libraries of citations, especially as the analysis tools work best with large sets of data.

Launched in November 2010, Colwiz has not yet been widely adopted, which means that some of the powerful functionality is not as effective as it could be. Many of the papers and citations I uploaded were only being read by me, which meant it was hard to find other related research or recommendations. This functionality will be more useful when more researchers add their citations to the database. Furthermore, some tools didn't work as well as they could—while being able to look up unrecognized citations in Google Scholar was very useful, it was far from seamless when Colwiz didn't recognize the title of the imported citation. Finally, not all databases are recognized or supported, a definite

drawback for some fields of research.

Comparison

After reviewing both Mendeley and Colwiz, it is evident that their strengths differ and adoption of one tool or the other would depend on the aims and situation of the researcher. One of the major differences was the focus of each tool. Mendeley, which has a huge publically accessible research catalog, as well as many analytic tools, seems more focused on the individual rather than groups. Colwiz, on the other hand, with its focus on project management tools and the need for an account to access citations and analytics, seems more suited for groups of researchers that are seeking to collaborate on papers and projects.

In terms of user experience, both tools provided functionality for uploading documents and citations from a desktop. I did find that the database integration was more seamless in Colwiz, as long as the database I wanted to search was supported. However, being able to sync Mendeley to my mobile device was a great advantage as this is where I do most of my scholarly reading. In a way, the comparison is slightly unfair because Mendeley is more established than Colwiz and has a much wider bank of citations on which to rely for recommendations. However, despite this minor impediment, I found both of these tools to be usable and efficient, and either would make a good alternative to more traditional tools.

Colwiz and Libraries

The potential for tools such as Colwiz to change the facilitation of knowledge creation is enormous. For users of Colwiz in particular, the possibility to search databases within Colwiz means that researchers may never have to visit the library website again, which has implications for the visibility and use of services, among other things, that librarians offer. Colwiz does not yet offer integration with library catalogs, but this would be key to ensuring that scholars have access to additional library resources. Tools such as Colwiz also throw interesting light on the move to provide one-stop search boxes on library websites. Colwiz exploits the Web and the



interconnections between researchers and journals to provide a new way of finding related research rather than "smushing" results from databases and catalogs into one confusing page of results.

Finally, Colwiz also highlights the need for librarians to engage more closely with educational technology needs as well as research needs. Colwiz successfully combines research tools with productivity or knowledge-creation tools that many consider to be external to the library's mission. However, if, as David Lankes says, "the mission of librarians is to improve society through facilitating knowledge creation in their communities" then librarians need to

be doubly involved in the provision, teaching, and integration of these tools.

In conclusion, Colwiz is a new tool that is full of potential. Designed by academics for academics, it supports every step of the research process, and, as such, is likely to grow in influence.

Endnotes



¹ "Colwiz collective wisdom," accessed September 19, 2011, http://www.colwiz.com.

² David R. Lankes, *The Atlas of New Librarianship* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011).