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Product Review: Knimbus: Free Personal Edition

Laura Pope Robbins
Dowling College, poperobl@erau.edu

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ADVISOR REVIEWS—STANDARD REVIEW

Knimbus: Free Personal Edition

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Composite Score:

★★★

Reviewed by: Laura Pope Robbins

Dowling College
 Dowling College Library
 150 Idle Hour Boulevard
 Oakdale, NY 11769
 <pope-rol@dowling.edu>

Abstract

Knimbus is both a search engine and a collaborative platform for scientists to find the information they need and connect them with other researchers in their field. As a search engine it provides a federated search of 32 Open Access resources and connects the researcher to the full text. As a collaborative platform, it provides a way for scientists to upload their documents and share them with their colleagues. Knimbus is an enterprising project that has excellent potential. Unfortunately, the searching is not as straightforward as it could be within the free version of the product and can provide irrelevant results. It shares the same problems as any federated search, but adds a few new ones with its search language.

Pricing Options

Knimbus provides both a free individual product as well as an institutional edition. Pricing on the institutional edition was not available at the time of this review.

Product Description

Knimbus <<http://www.knimbus.com/>>, founded in India, is designed to be a collaborative platform that combines social networking with research. It was specifically created for the scientific academic and research communities to enable them to discover materials and share knowledge. As a discovery tool, Knimbus provides a federated search of open resources, such as the Public Library of Science (PLOS), Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), PubMed Central, Springer Open, Wiley Open Access, Taylor & Francis Open, and Molecular Diversity Preservation International. This distinguishes it from other social bibliographic utilities like CiteULike, Mendeley, and Zotero.

Knimbus also provides cloud storage so that researchers may upload and store their papers allowing them to be accessed from anywhere. Uploaded papers are private and accessible only to the individual who uploaded them unless they choose to share it within a project. A bookmarklet can be added to any browser so that scholars can add materials to their Knimbus library as they research. Collaboration is done by creating groups or projects. Groups are open to the community, while projects are private and shared only with the project members. Other social aspects of Knimbus including tagging, liking, and sharing which contribute to the popularity of the materials researched and contribute to the rankings in the search results. Additionally, a researcher can choose to integrate Knimbus with his Facebook account.

There is also an institutional edition of Knimbus that is currently used by 2200+ institutions (Khera 2014). That version provides a feder-

ated search of both subscription products the institution already has available to it in addition to the Open Access sources. Additionally, for those institutions that desire one, Knimbus can provide an institutional repository system. Included with the search package are journal finder, remote access to resources, and integration with a library's OPAC. Knimbus will provide statistics on what publications are accessed most, but statistics are not COUNTER compliant (Reeves 2014). It is possible to arrange a trial to the institutional edition directly through Knimbus or through WT Cox Information Services which provides Knimbus to customers in the United States.

Critical Evaluation

Knimbus is an ambitious product. The goal of creating a federated search of Open Access resources to foster collaboration and scientific knowledge is both unique and highly beneficial. Unfortunately, it suffers from some of the same problems that any federated search does. The way that information is searched across products is not standardized, so that an author search may use initials in one resource for first name while another will use the entire first name. While many federated searches use mapping and scripting to combat that problem, it is unclear whether Knimbus' search addresses it. Another common problem with federated searching is duplicate results, and these are apparent in Knimbus as well.

At first glance, it looks like Knimbus is a standard search engine. The home page provides a search box, a place to sign up, a video explaining how a modern-day Einstein would use Knimbus for his research, and a long page to scroll through explaining the service. Once a researcher signs up, he is taken to his home screen that allows him to upload his own papers, search, manage his saved records, explore groups, and more. The simple search box at the top of the screen presents researchers with a Google-like interface making researchers comfortable. However, unlike Google, there are no links for help to provide search tips which researchers would find useful.

It is unclear how Boolean operators are applied in the simple search. When Boolean operators are included in a search, they are used as search terms. It was only after multiple searches that it became clear that Knimbus utilizes both an AND and OR search at the same time similar to Google. The AND results are listed first and then the OR results. There did not appear to be any way to clearly group search terms using parentheses, especially without knowing how to apply Boolean terminology.

It was only upon moving to the advanced search, that it was apparent Knimbus had created their own Boolean substitutes. Knimbus uses ALL for AND, ANY for OR, and EXCLUDE for NOT. Additionally, Knimbus uses the term EXACT to indicate a phrase search; quota-

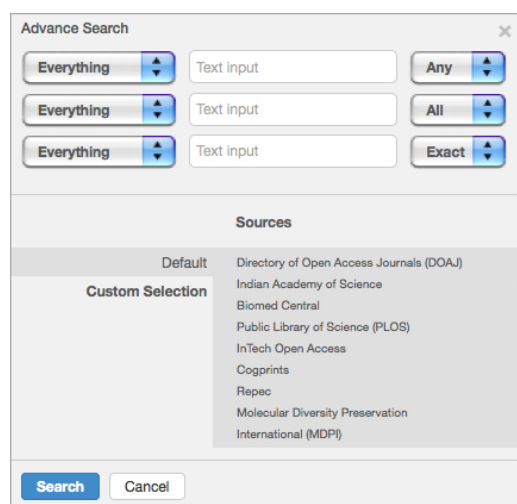


FIGURE 1 Advanced Search

tion marks are ignored. While this change in language may make it simpler for the novice searcher, for a skilled researcher familiar with using Boolean operators, it adds a barrier to successful searching. Additionally, in an institutional setting, this could be very confusing to students who are taught to use Boolean operators in subscription databases.

The advanced search is equally confusing. The Boolean operator substitutes are at the end of each search line (Figure 1). This makes it seem that it applies only to that search line. There are options for field searching including: title, abstract, author, everything, affiliation, publication, ISSN, ISBN, and DOI. However, as a researcher selects a field to search, a note will appear saying that not all publishers support that particular type of search.

Search results are provided in a two-column layout with citations on the right and limits or filters on the left-hand side. Knimbus claims to provide full citation information; however, many citations provide only the title, author, and date as well as in which resource it was located. The search defaults to published content though it also provides links to view the most popular content as well as the most shared content related to the search topic. Another way to filter the material is through key word. The key word option appears to be based upon tags contributed by users. The results can also be narrowed by resource, publication, author, and date.

The strength of Knimbus is in the number of open content publishers it searches. Currently, there are 32 different resources listed within their search, including scholarly ones like the Public Library of Science (PLOS), PubMed, Cogprints, Open Library, Wiley Open Access, and Hathi Open Trust. There are also sources such as the Bangladesh Journal Online, the International Institute for Science, Technology, and Education, and the Indian Academy of Science which reflect that

Knimbus was created out of a need to connect Indian researchers with the global community. And, there are some resources that are more questionable and not explained, such as Academic Journals and SlideShare.

Knimbus' weakness appears to be its search engine. Once a researcher understands the applications of ALL, ANY, and EXCLUDE, searching should be straightforward. However, it is not. In examining this search engine, searches for known materials and authors who have published in the Public Library of Science were conducted. Using an everything search on the author's last name and a word from the title, produced the confusing message of "No Matches Found" in the search results box, while on the left-hand side of the screen it read "0 of 142 results" with "120 more results found: show all" (Figure 2). Selecting "show all" brought up results that matched the search terms (Figure 3). Changing the search to a combined author and keyword search again presented with "No Matches Found" and that confusing message about the number of results: "0 of 3 results" with "3 more results found: show all." Showing all brought up the exact article, a duplicate entry for the article, and one completely unrelated to the topic.

At this point, a new search was conducted by clicking on the author's name within the search results (Figure 4). This resulted in "No Matches Found." When the "44 more results" out of 553 were selected, the original article was returned along with many unrelated ones. The second listed an author with the same first and last name but a different middle initial. After that, all of the results featured an author who shared the same first name but not the last. These types of results point to OR searching having been applied. Even if an author search generated by clicking on a name breaks a name into two separate author searches by first and last name, none of the results should feature only one of the names.

A separate search on a known DOI returned equally confusing results. A researcher would expect only one result, but there were many unrelated articles returned as well. It is difficult to determine how a researcher would perform an OR/ANY search using phrases which require the use of the term EXACT. The inability to use quotations for phrase searches makes the application of the Boolean searching very uncertain. The fact that searches return "No Matches Found" when there are actually matches is disconcerting and off putting. The lack of search tips and help screens that would help researchers understand results like that demonstrates poor communication with users.

The search results are also where the social components of Knimbus come into play. It is possible to mark results to save them to "My

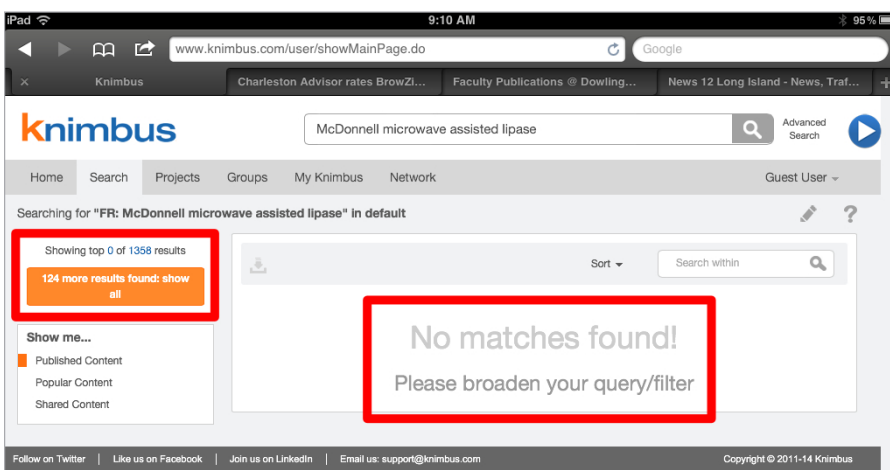


FIGURE 2 No Results

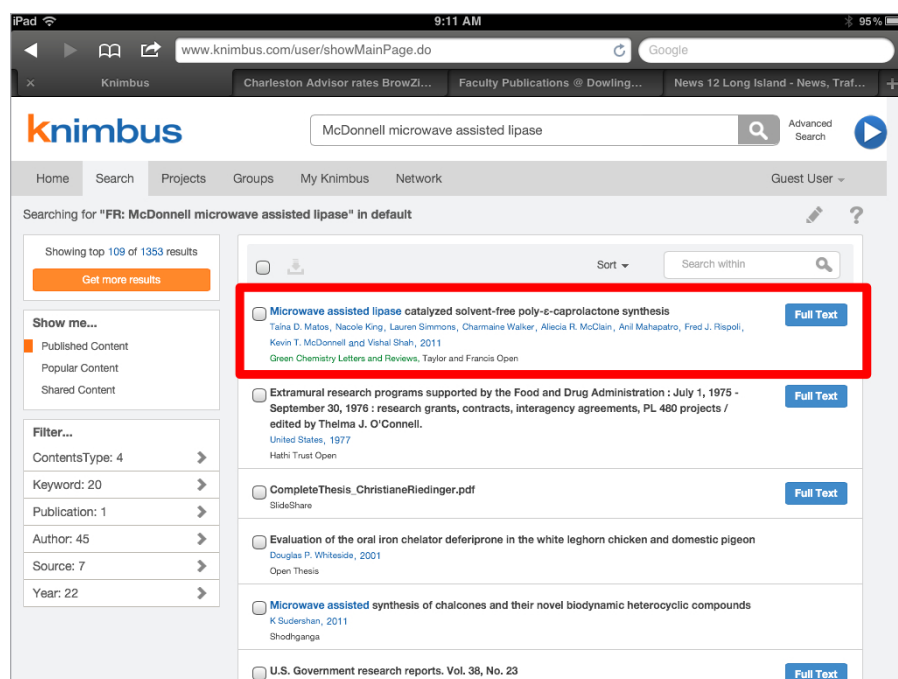


FIGURE 3 Additional Results

export all of the citations within a folder in a single operation. It requires multiple exports based upon the type of document. Additionally, the export from within “My Knimbus” is unreliable.

The closest competitors to Knimbus are PubGet <<http://www.pubget.com/>> and ResearchGate <<http://www.researchgate.net/>>. PubGet is focused on providing current research in the life sciences to researchers as quickly as possible. It provides a free search service that focuses on PubMed. The free service can be set up with e-mail alerts on saved searches so that new information is delivered right to the researcher. Additionally, libraries can sign up with PubGet for free to provide information on openURL resolvers so that researchers can be directed back to the library’s resources to retrieve subscription-based full text. So, while PubGet is focused on discovery, it does not provide a collaborative or social interface.

ResearchGate, which was founded in Germany, does provide a social interface and is focused on scientists in general as is Knimbus. It provides a free service in which researchers can upload their documents and publications, research, create projects to collaborate with their colleagues, and search a job board. Like Knimbus, ResearchGate can be tied to a Facebook account. ResearchGate is more focused on the collaborative nature of research and may be closer to a LinkedIn specifically for scientists than to the research platform that Knimbus aspires to be.

Knimbus has the potential to be an excellent resource. For the individual researcher, it pulls together many disparate authoritative sources that they may not have otherwise encountered. However, searching is not as straightforward as it could be with the change in Boolean language and the inability to group terms. This results in searches that are not as accurate as they could be. Additionally, it is interesting to note that the same search will return different results over time. But that discrepancy may be caused by how quickly Knimbus severs connections to the different resources it is searching. Unfortunately, this review is limited to the free version of Knimbus; it may be that the institutional edition has addressed these types of issues.

Knimbus;” like a result; share to it a project, group or via e-mail; or preview it. It is in the preview that a researcher can add tags to the resource and add comments to it. A researcher can also choose to view the full text. “My Knimbus” is broken into sections for saved papers, Web clips, uploaded documents, and saved searches. In both searching and within the personal area of Knimbus, it is possible to select results and export the citation. The citation can be exported in CSV, RIS, Bibtext, EndNote, or plain text for importation into a citation management system. Unfortunately, the citation data is incomplete. Additionally, if Knimbus truly wishes to serve as a one-stop research and collaboration tool, it would be better if they provided the citations in proper bibliographic formats instead of requiring their researchers to use another tool. Being a resource aimed at the scientific community, it would make sense to provide citations in formats like CBE, AMA, ACS, APA, or other scientific styles.

Saved papers, Web clips, and uploaded documents can all be organized by folder. But, here again, Knimbus does not do the expected. Where a researcher may think he is organizing his research by placing it within folders, he instead finds that the information remains segregated by type within the folder itself. Therefore, it is not possible to

Contract Provisions

Because this review is based upon the free version of Knimbus, information on contract provisions for the institutional edition is not available. Knimbus users agree to not present themselves as resellers of the Knimbus service; agree to not reverse engineer the product; and agree to hold Knimbus harmless in the event of some type of loss from use of the product. That type of language is fairly standard for a free Web-based product. Those

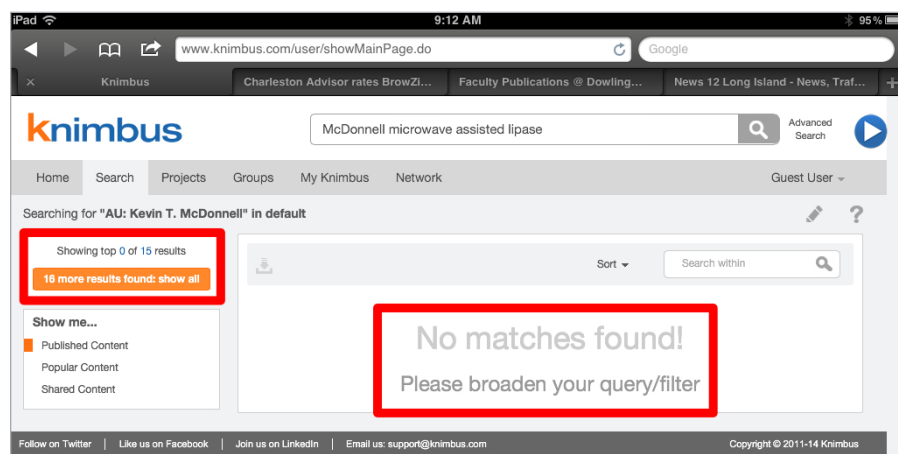


FIGURE 4 No Results for Author



Knimbus Review Scores Composite: ★★ ★

The maximum number of stars in each category is 5.

Content: ★★ ★ ★

Knimbus is an ambitious project that brings together 32 Open Access repositories and makes them searchable in a single search interface. This is a highly beneficial undertaking. Unfortunately, not all of the resources included within the search are necessarily scholarly, notably SlideShare, and some, such as Academic Journals, could benefit from noting the derivation of that content.

User Interface/Searchability: ★ ★

The interface is clear and easy to use. However, the substitute Boolean operators are not explained anywhere and cannot be easily applied in the simple search. The application of the operators in the advanced search is also confusing because it is not clear whether they apply to a single search box or across the search boxes. Knimbus also appears to default to a fuzzy search that combines AND and OR searching, returning irrelevant results.

Pricing: NA

Contract Options: NA

who value their privacy may wish to think about signing up as part of the contract grants Knimbus the right to use “search and social actions to create social ads using your profile photo and name.” Another consideration to take into account is that Knimbus was founded and created in India, thus the laws governing the agreement are the “laws of India and the Courts at New Delhi” (Knimbus 2014).

Authentication

For individual users, authentication is done through providing an e-mail address and creating a password.

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About the Author

Laura Pope Robbins is an Associate Professor/Reference Librarian at Dowling College. She holds an MBA in Information Systems Management from Dowling College and an MLS from the University of Washington. She is currently Web Master at Dowling College Library as well as overseeing Reference and Interlibrary Loan. Her research interests include anime, copyright, usability, Web design, and Web 2.0. During her free time she studies Japanese and bookbinding. ■

Contact Information

Knimbus

E-mail: <info@knimbus.com>

URL: <<http://www.knimbus.com>>