

Five Things To Consider When Selecting a Plagiarism Prevention Service

When evaluating any information system, you must look beyond just the up-front licensing costs to make an informed decision. Additional factors such as feature sets, quality of support, and vendor credibility can be crucial in finding a solution that fits your needs. As you consider plagiarism prevention tools, we recommend you include the following evaluation criteria.

#1: Quality and Ease of Use

Given the amount of time you will spend using the system, it is crucial that you be comfortable with its functionality and confident in its quality. This isn't a question of whether it looks nice, or can do the things you want it to do, but is instead a question of how efficiently and effectively it works.

For example, will you be able to import student lists, or will your instructors be required to type them into the system at the start of each semester? Can you preview a paper before you submit it? Do the originality reports offer side-by-side comparisons with the original text? How long do originality reports take to be delivered? Does the system accept a wide range of file types, or only text and word files? At first glance, these issues may seem minor, but when amplified across all of your users day in and day out, they can mean the difference between widespread adoption and a tool that's paid for but never used.

#2: The Quality of the Database

A plagiarism prevention tool is only as effective as the database of intellectual property it searches. For example, a system that only compares papers within a single campus will not find instances of a paper being sold to students across the country. Similarly, a database that relies exclusively on internet searches will miss

papers that plagiarize articles published in journals. As you evaluate the quality of a plagiarism prevention database, consider asking the following key questions:

- Are papers compared to millions of others submitted from institutions all around the world?
- Are the papers compared to materials that aren't on the internet, such as books and journals?
- Are the papers compared to both current and archived snapshots of the internet?

A viable plagiarism detection service must have good answers to these questions, and any credible vendor should be able to support their claims with proof.

#3: Legal Protection

Unfortunately, there are unscrupulous vendors in the marketplace, and a bad choice on your part could lead to serious legal repercussions. For example, some plagiarism prevention services have a well-documented history of simultaneously running plagiarism prevention sites alongside paper mills and cheatsites. This raises the possibility that you could be held liable for forcing your students to deliver their intellectual property to a firm that will turn around and sell it to other students.

Similarly, if your vendor uses any of the major search engines without being properly licensed, you could

be named as a codefendant if they are sued. Since we currently know of no major search engines that will grant licenses for these types of searches, make sure you ask to see copies of your vendor's search-engine and content licensing agreements, and consult with your institution's lawyer before signing any agreement.

Some telling questions to ask a potential vendor are:

- Do they search the internet legally, either using their own crawler or a licensed search engine?
- Have their policies been vetted by reputable law firms in multiple countries?
- What type of liability insurance does the vendor maintain?

#4: Total Cost of Ownership

The actual costs of any IT system go well beyond up-front licensing fees. When you factor in the time spent training your staff, interacting with tech support, and actually using the product, the licensing costs end up just a fraction of the total. Should you choose a tool that comes with inadequate training materials or support, your real costs will go up dramatically. Consider asking any potential vendor the following questions:

- What sort of training support materials are provided with the license?
- How big is your training and support staff?
- Do you offer phone support in addition to email support?
- Do you have redundant data centers to preclude catastrophic, multiple-day downtimes?

Without good answers to these questions, you may end up spending more on your plagiarism prevention tool than you bargained for.

#5: Vendor Reputation

A good measure of a company is not what they say about themselves, but what other people say about them. Any company can claim to be a leader in their field, but the true test is whether they are viewed as a

leader by media outlets like the *The New York Times*, *60 Minutes*, *The Economist*, *NPR*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. The depth of a company's press clippings offer more insight into their reputation than anything their sales people can tell you.

Ultimately, however, the best measure of a company is the satisfaction of its customers. Before committing to any vendor, scrutinize their customer list, read through their case studies, and ask the following questions:

- Do they serve institutions of the same size and make-up as yours?
- Do the customer stories come with statistics about the impact the tool made?
- How many of their customers are cited by name?
- What is their annual renewal rate?
- Will they let you speak with any of the customers directly?

Without some real indication that customers like you are happy with the system, it is hard to have any confidence that you will be.