Designing The Primo Next Discovery Experience (NDE UI): A Deep Dive Into Our Design Principles

Clarivate | **Ex Libris**

In redesigning the Next Discovery Experience (NDE UI) for Primo, our goal was to craft an intuitive, flexible, and user-friendly interface tailored to the needs of academic libraries and their users. In the new design, we focused on implementing core design principles that balance familiarity with innovation, ensuring a seamless experience while introducing new functionalities. Through a combination of user research, iterative testing, and customization capabilities, we shaped an experience that empowers institutions and enhances user engagement. Here's a behind-the-scenes look at how we applied our design principles to build the NDE UI.

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1 | **Creating the Layout:**
Blending Familiarity
with Discovery
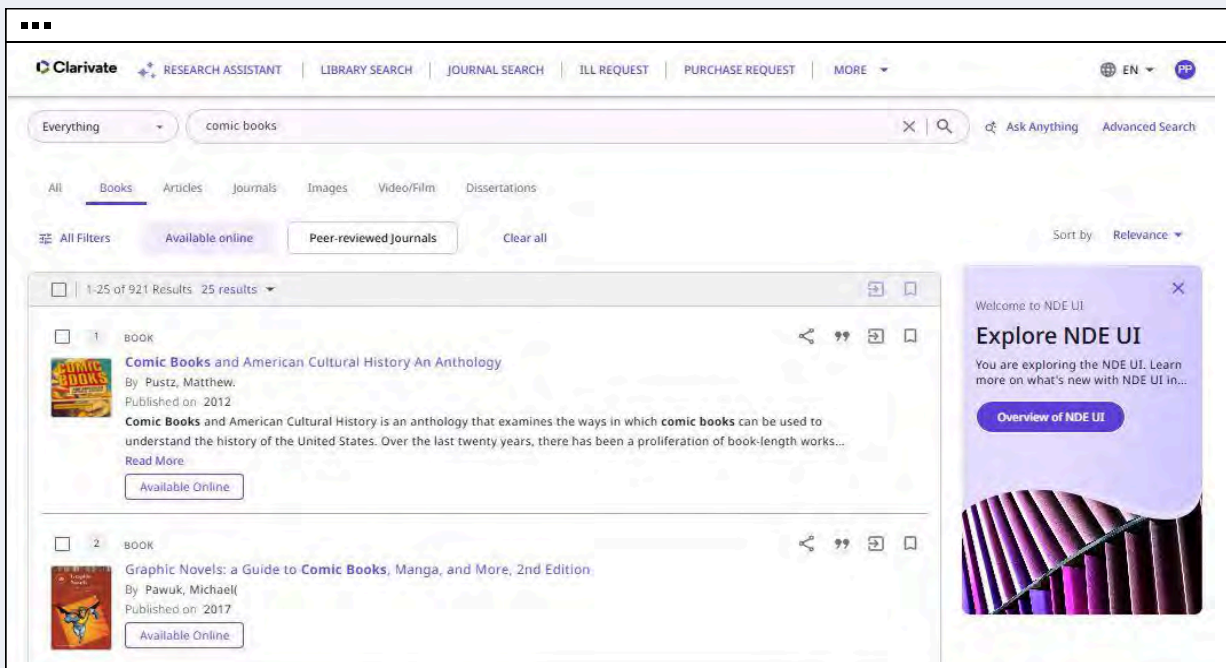
One of the biggest challenges in designing the NDE was maintaining the familiarity that users expect while enhancing their discovery experience. We achieved this by:

Prioritizing Information Hierarchy
Ensuring that the most relevant search results and actions appear prominently, reducing cognitive load.

Enhancing Visual Guidance
Using progressive disclosure to reveal new features naturally, allowing users to explore enhancements without feeling overwhelmed.

Optimizing Responsiveness
Designing an adaptable layout that offers a seamless experience across different devices and screen sizes.
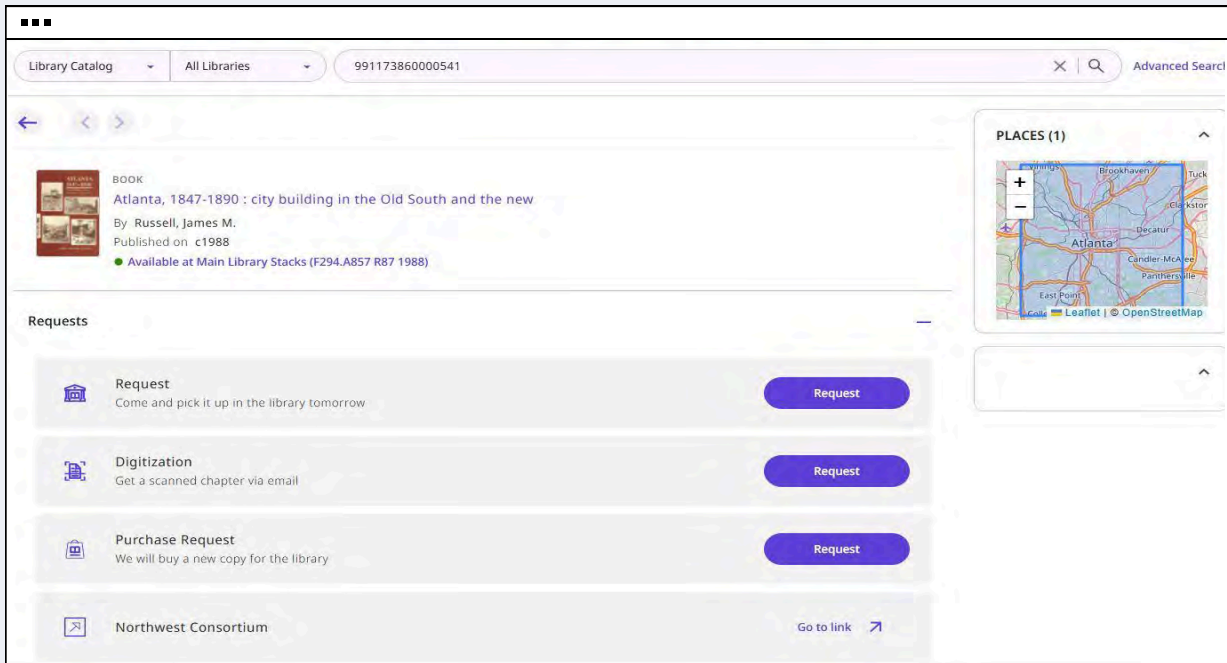
Designed for emerging discovery behaviours
Inherently built to adapt to new discovery patterns and future research technologies

"By focusing on these aspects, we created a design that felt both intuitive and modern, helping users transition smoothly while benefiting from new capabilities."

2 | **Our Core UX Values:**
Guiding the Redesign

Throughout the process, we adhered to key UX principles that guided our design decisions:

User-Friendly & Accessible
Ensuring ease of use for both new and experienced users, with clear navigation and WCAG-compliant accessibility features.

Convenience & Efficiency
Reducing the number of steps required to find and access relevant information (such as book reviews staying within the record vs taking the user to another page as well as simplified request work flows).

Focus on What Matters
Using visual hierarchy, typography, and spacing to direct users' attention to essential content first.
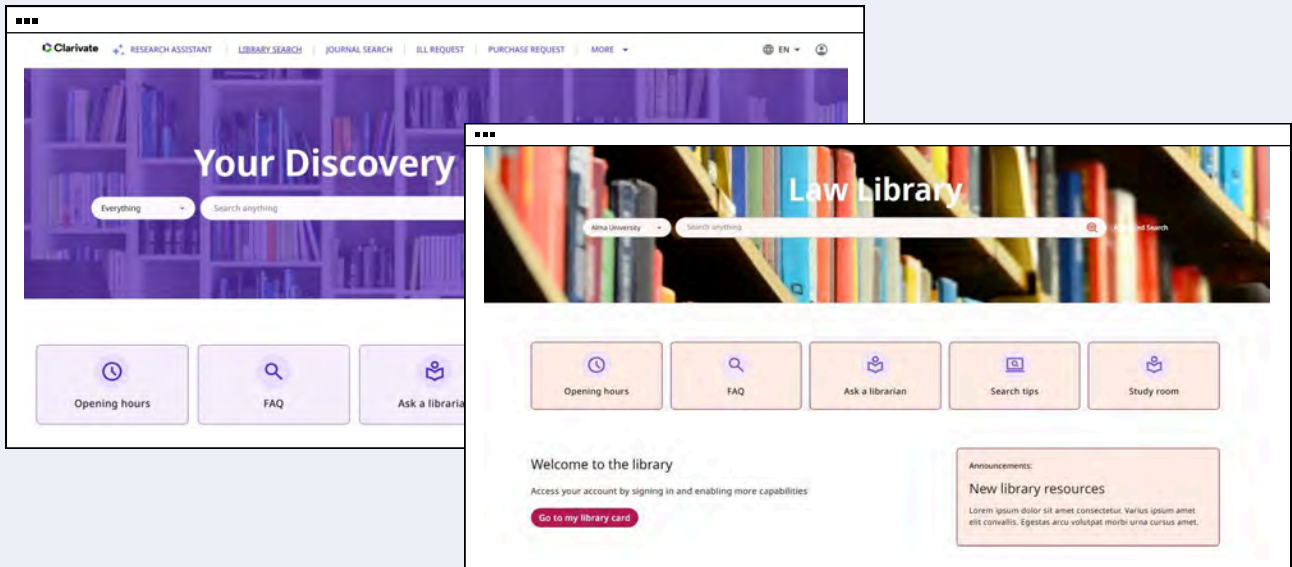
Consistency with Innovation
Keeping familiar elements while introducing new features in a non-disruptive manner.

"By staying true to these values, we created a search and discovery experience that balances usability, flexibility, and innovation."

3 | **Enabling Customization:** Empowering Institutions

One of the most powerful aspects of the NDE is its customizability. Academic institutions have unique needs, and our goal was to provide flexibility while maintaining a consistent user experience. To achieve this, we:

Developed UI customization options
allowing institutions to tailor and create their own elements such as branding, colors, images, feature placements, and creating their own personalized features based on their needs.

Provided modular components
so institutions can decide which features to emphasize based on their user base.

Following Material 3 guidelines
to ensure that when users customize features, the process remains accessible, seamless, and maintains consistent component behavior (e.g., hover states, buttons, popups, and interactions). Additionally, adhering to this framework enables users from a technical perspective to effortlessly enhance and customize personal features over time, ultimately improving the experience for end users.

Ensured accessibility settings
to help libraries better cater to users with diverse needs. This included aligning color themes, clickable components, and typography with WCAG guidelines to enhance readability, usability, and overall accessibility.

"This approach allows each institution to maintain its identity while benefiting from the broader improvements of the NDE."

4 | Learning from Our Users
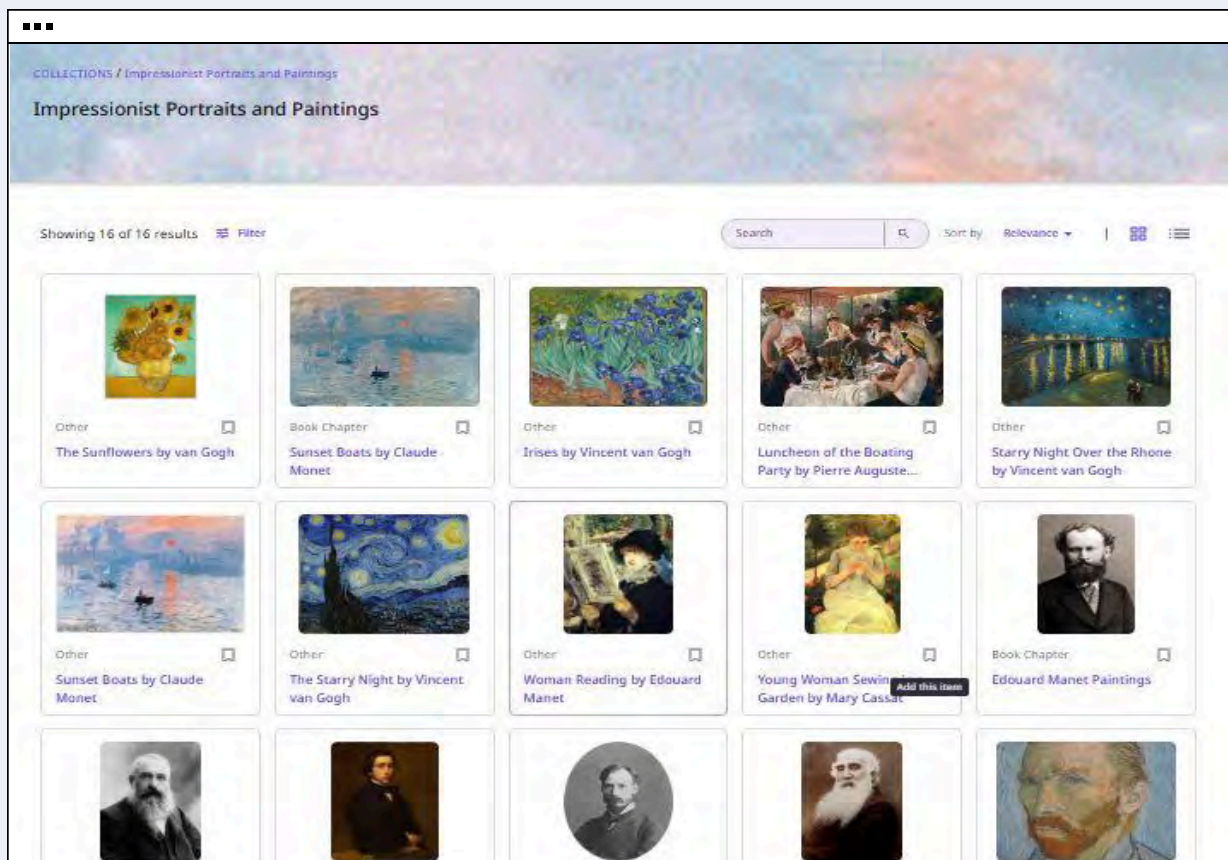
A core part of our design process involved actively listening to our users.
We conducted monthly focus groups with librarians, user studies with students (end users), and leveraged an external feedback tool to gather continuous input on our workflows. Additionally, we launched a survey to 100 early-access customers for initial insights and used Mixpanel to analyze user journeys throughout the NDE. This comprehensive approach allowed us to:

Gather real-time feedback
on the usability of new features.

Identify pain points
and friction areas in the interface.

Iterate on design decisions
based on direct user insights.

"This continuous feedback loop ensured that our design decisions were grounded in actual user needs rather than assumptions, allowing us to make informed improvements along the way."

About Ex Libris, part of Clarivate

Ex Libris, part of Clarivate, is a leading global provider of cloud-based solutions that enable institutions and their users to create, manage, and share knowledge. In close collaboration with its customers and the broader community, Ex Libris develops solutions that increase library productivity, maximize the impact of research activities, enhance teaching and learning, and drive student mobile engagement.
Ex Libris serves over 7,500 customers in 90 countries.

⟶ **Read more about Primo**

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