EZproxy

A Remote Access Solution for Library Databases

Review Date: 2 March 2019

Overall Score (Weighted Total)	Stars: Insert > Image > Search "4 stars" etc. ★★★★★

Content — 40% (Quality, uniqueness, reliability, and appropriateness for community college audience)	5
Interface — 25% (Usability, customization, mobile supported, lack of problems, print/download/email content, citation formatting)	4
Cost — 15% (Value and terms of use)	5
Accessibility — 15% (Compliance with standards)	5
Support — 5% (For administrators and users)	5

EZproxy is software that makes it easier for users to access library databases from off-campus.

<u>**Review**</u>

Introduction

Library database vendors limit access to their licensed resources, requiring either access from an authorized IP address (for site-licensed products) or a valid username and password. EZproxy provides a link between database vendor authentication methods (usually IP address based authentication) and local authentication methods based on user identity. EZproxy supports a wide variety of local authentication methods and protocols ([list on the OCLC website](#)) and It can be installed locally or is available as a hosted service.

Interface

From the point of view of end-users EZproxy displays a login screen when off-campus access to licensed resources is first attempted. After successful authentication a cookie is placed in the browser cache and any further access to the same or other licensed resources at the same institution is transparent to the user. Users normally interact with EZproxy only for the login screen; unless there are login problems or configuration errors, though in most configurations of EZproxy all traffic for the duration of the session is routed through the EZproxy server.

EZproxy does not change the interface or interaction for licensed resources if configured correctly. Sometimes there can be problems when a resource changes coding and problems are noted. OCLC and the EZproxy user community usually deal with these in a timely manner.

Mobile-friendly

The default EZproxy login page is not designed as a responsive web page, but works well on mobile devices, However, many libraries implementing EZproxy will choose to implement a page better integrated with the library website or database portal. Once a user is logged in, EZproxy has no impact on the remote resource's layout, so some sites will better support mobile devices than others.

Initialization and Administration

There is some work involved for installation and administration of EZproxy, which can be an issue for libraries or institutions with limited IT staff. For locally hosted instances a server needs to be provisioned, a wild card DNS SSL certificate should be purchased and installed and will need to be renewed on a regular basis. There will also be questions regarding how users authenticate; institutions that have implemented single sign-on (SSO) options may wish to include EZproxy as an SSO service. College IT departments may not understand the purpose of the EZproxy server and it may be difficult to gain their cooperation on this project. There are many ways to configure the EZproxy service, and configuration involves editing text files at the command line or using FTP/SFTP to overlay these files rather than using a GUI interface. OCLC will offer direct support via email, phone and web-conferencing sessions to solve initial configuration problems.

Once installed, administration of an EZproxy server requires command line access (or FTP/SFTP) to add and update database stanzas, short configuration strings which name the resources to be proxied and provide information to the server on how to handle these resources. OCLC provides updated lists of these stanzas on their website.
For institutions unable or unwilling to run a local EZproxy server there is a hosted subscription option available, at about ten times the annual cost. This eliminates the need for installation of

the software, maintenance of a server or updating SSL certificates. It also comes with certain limitations; for instance, using a single server for multiple colleges with distinct resources will not be practical. Editing database stanzas is still required.

Initial testing of each proxied resource is recommended. If library users complain of access problems, the library must first determine if it is an EZproxy-related problem or a vendor problem. When problems occur, troubleshooting and resolution can be time-consuming. Use of EZproxy requires that URLs to licensed resources be prepended with the URL of the EZproxy server. So a URL to http://some.database.com must be listed as http://ezproxy.your.edu/login?url=http://some.database.com whenever and where-ever it is used. This can be confusing for users because links without the EZproxy prefix will work on-campus but not off-campus.

Accessibility
EZproxy is an accessible product for end-users. The EZproxy login screen uses very simple html and works well with screen readers. Proxied database content is not any less accessible with EZproxy than using the database directly.

Support
OCLC provides excellent support for EZproxy. Their support website at https://help.oclc.org/Library_Management/EZproxy is open and contains a large amount of support information. Some issues are not covered in depth, however. OCLC telephone and email technical support is available for institutions with a current support contract. The EZproxy listserv is the most likely place to find solutions to various problems that crop up. Most database vendors support access via EZproxy, and many are much quicker to fix problems with EZproxy than with competing proxy solutions.

Cost
EZproxy is a good value for libraries interested in easy remote access to their licensed resources. If local IT resources are available, the locally hosted solution is available at very low cost, given the value it provides. The hosted solution is a bigger hit to small budgets but will vastly reduce setup and maintenance time.

The Competition
There are no other products that directly compete with EZproxy. If a library does not use EZproxy it can rely on database vendor-provided authentication methods or use other methods to allow users access to licensed resources. Many public libraries and smaller institutions use database vendor-provided methods. They are less convenient for users but require less support from the institution.   Many universities require use of a proxy server (such as Squid) or a VPN client (virtual private network) for remote access to licensed resources. These route traffic to

licensed resources through the authorized IP address space, satisfying vendor requirements. They do however require configuration by end users. They are more flexible in that database URLs require no special editing and no configuration of resources by the library is required, while EZproxy requires both.

Conclusion

EZproxy is a unique product in widespread use in libraries all over the world.