

□ ONLINE DATABASES □

BY CAROL TENOPIR

Familiar Faces, New Places

THERE IS AN OLD SONG from the Seventies that begins, "It's so nice to see familiar faces out in the crowd." This song keeps running through my mind as I observe what's happening in the database industry in the first quarter of 1993. The line seems to sum up the industry situation: many familiar faces are being seen in new crowds. Barbara Quint, the Martha Williams's and Cuadra Associates' database directories, Data-Star, and DIALOG's Knowledge Index are all moving to new places.

Quint's *Searcher*

Barbara Quint is a familiar face, or at least voice, to almost every online searcher. A self-styled watchdog of the database industry, Quint is a vociferous and articulate speaker for the online professional. She is a frequent speaker at database conferences, last year bringing the searcher's viewpoint even to the Information Industry Association crowd. She writes columns for *Wilson Library Bulletin* and *Information Today*, but her most expansive voice was as editor of *Database Searcher*, a magazine published by Meckler from 1984 until January 1993.

Last December, Meckler announced it would replace *Database Searcher* with a new offering called *Document Delivery World (DDW)*. Although Quint will contribute a column to *DDW*, the focus will be limited to the document delivery aspect of databases.

Database searchers need not despair that their interests will no longer be fully represented, because Quint will bring her talents and editorial voice to a new journal launched by Learned Information in May 1993. This journal, *Searcher: The Magazine for Database Professionals*, will cover

all electronic media—online, CD-ROM, diskette, tape leasing, etc.

Searcher is aimed at experienced searchers who need evaluative reviews, commentary, news, and search tips or techniques. The intent is to "explore and deliberate on a comprehensive range of issues important to the professional database searcher."

According to Quint, the "new magazine will take flat news and compress it by presenting it in a brief but cogent form. My readers will not miss any news, but what people really read my magazine for is value added. Everything will have a point of view."

Quint promises to approach "everything from the angle of the working searcher. My magazine will represent the searcher's interests." She will "continue to follow the beat of my own missionary drum of representing searchers as an equal partner in the database industry."

Not every review, article, or column in *Searcher* will be written by Quint, but you can bet her editorial voice and style will be a big part of the new magazine's appeal. If anyone can "explore and deliberate," she can.

Congratulations to Learned Information for recognizing the importance of publishing a magazine both by and for knowledgeable searchers, especially when it is edited by someone who is clearly not afraid to speak her mind. Tom Hogan, president of Learned Information Inc., believes that "Barbara's unique perspective on the information scene deserves to be shared with the rest of the user community and with the information industry." Hogan realizes that the "database world needs more of what she has to offer."

Searcher: The Magazine for Database Professionals joins other Learned publications for database searchers, including *Information Today*, *Link-Up*, and *Online Review*. The new addition will have nine issues per year, starting in May, for a yearly subscription of \$49.50. Contact: Learned Information, Inc., 143 Old Marlton Pike, Medford, NJ 08055; 609-654-6266; FAX 609-654-4309.

Gale's *Directory of Databases*

In the database directory world, the familiar faces for over a decade belonged to Martha Williams (*Computer-Readable Databases*) and Cuadra Associates (*Directory of Online Databases* and *Directory of Portable Databases*). Over the last few years, Gale Research acquired all of these directories, maintaining them as separate publications through 1992.

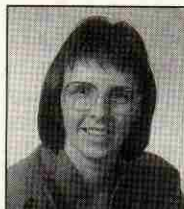
After much study and input from an advisory committee, as of January 1993 the new *Gale Directory of Databases* replaces the old familiar standbys. The new two-volume directory will be published twice a year, in January and July. Volume 1 covers "Online Databases"; Volume 2 includes databases on CD-ROM, diskette, magnetic tape, handheld products, and batch processing services.

According to Gale Executive VP Rod Gauvin, "This isn't an absorption of Cuadra/Gale into *Computer-Readable Databases* or vice versa. We took the very best of all the directories and created an entirely new product."

Directory editor Kathleen Young Marcaccio explained that "these are extremely popular products so we were careful that nothing of value was lost in the consolidation."

For the most part, Gale's attempt to retain the best features of the old directories has succeeded. Users of the old directories will note that the new one maintains the database price information so valuable to *Computer-Readable Databases* but uses the more concise style for entries and clear layout from *Directory of Online Databases*. Database producer addresses and phone numbers are repeated at each entry, so a double lookup is not required, as it was in the Cuadra/Gale directories. Discontinued databases are listed with a note on their condition, an important feature of *Computer-Readable Databases* that Gale had considered dropping. Williams's informative essay on "The State of the Database Industry Today" is here as well.

This first offering is not perfect—better proofreading is needed, and some of the information needs to be



Carol Tenopir is Associate Professor at the School of Library and Information Studies, University of Hawaii at Manoa, Honolulu

ONLINE DATABASES

clarified. It was a bit discouraging to find at least two errors before getting past the front matter! (On the Acknowledgments page, my affiliation is listed as the School of Library and Information Science instead of the correct *Studies* and the University of Illinois is placed in *Champagne*, Illinois instead of *Champaign*.)

More disturbing is that all price entries are the same for any database available on NEXIS/LEXIS. For almost every NEXIS/LEXIS database, the statement reads as follows: "\$6-\$50 per search, depending on the database selected; \$39/connect hour, 25¢/line displayed online (nonlegal), 20¢/line displayed online (legal), 70¢/line displayed online (company/industry reports)." In some entries, the price is missing completely. Prices for other online systems are correct and specific to the database.

Luckily, the directory will be completely replaced at every six-month update. Typographical and formatting errors can be fixed, and changes can be reflected. Some information in the first 1993 edition was out of date before it even appeared. For example, the directory still lists Predicasts as the producer of the PTS databases with a Cleveland address. But Information Access Company bought Predicasts over a year ago, and the PTS production was moved to California. NEXIS is still listed as a vendor of the ABI/INFORM database, a relationship that was terminated last year.

Still, the two volumes of the *Gale Directory of Databases* form an essential tool for searchers and should be a part of every library's database reference collection. It will undoubtedly improve as searchers have a chance to use it and react to it. Gale invites feedback, corrections, and additions.

An annual subscription for both volumes is \$280. Volume 1 can be ordered alone for \$199/yr.; Volume 2 is available alone for \$119/yr. Contact: Gale Research Inc., 835 Penobscot Bldg., Detroit, MI 48226; 800-877-4253; 313-961-2242.

Data-Star to Knight-Ridder

For many searchers, DIALOG Information Services Inc. is the most familiar old face. Although DIALOG's owner changed from Lockheed to Knight-Ridder several years ago and the CEO changed from founder Roger Summit to Patrick Tierney a year ago, changes were seemingly mostly inter-

nal. Not any longer.

Knight-Ridder announced on March 1, 1993 that it had also acquired its Swiss online competitor, Data-Star. Data-Star is an important presence in European online circles and has made a name for itself in the United States recently as a North American marketing push was just beginning to pay off.

Data-Star provides access to over 250 U.S. and European databases, mostly bibliographic and directory. Some of the same databases are available on both DIALOG and Data-Star but almost always with lower prices on Data-Star. Some librarians say they always check Data-Star first to get the best bargains. A 20 percent discount for non-prime time usage (defined by a Swiss clock) is a great deal in North America, and Data-Star's IBM-Stairs-based software is familiar to anyone who knows BRS.

Knight-Ridder vows it will "build on the individual strengths of the two companies" and "continue to enhance and develop both systems." At least through 1993, prices will remain the same, and duplicated databases will be kept on both systems. Data-Star will remain a European-focused service. However, a gateway between the two systems will make it easy in the short run for Data-Star customers to access DIALOG and vice versa. DIALOG prefers to think of this as "a merger of two strong companies rather than a takeover."

Data-Star's strength in Europe must be what is most appealing to Knight-Ridder. DIALOG has been trying to beef up its marketing efforts in Europe, after finding it difficult to rely on subcontractors. Data-Star comes with an in-place experienced staff of European nationals. This alone makes it attractive to DIALOG.

DIALOG's CEO Tierney says that Data-Star's staff and management will remain, with sales, service, and R&D merged with DIALOG's operations. European offices will market both services, at least for now, with specialists in both Data-Star and DIALOG.

The acquisition makes DIALOG an even stronger force in the worldwide information community. Although the full impact of the acquisition is as yet unclear, reduction of competition is rarely good for the user. Let's hope DIALOG and Knight-Ridder follow through on their pledges to make both services stronger.

CompuServe and Knowledge Index

DIALOG's other first quarter announcement continues its change of direction. A "strategic partnership" between DIALOG and CompuServe will see CompuServe taking over DIALOG's Knowledge Index end user service on April 1. CompuServe will take over all marketing, billing, and customer support, with DIALOG reducing its role to providing maintenance and technical services. Printed documentation for Knowledge Index will no longer be available, and the *Knowledge Index News* will no longer be published.

Knowledge Index is DIALOG's only product aimed at the home user. The system is accessible only after 6 p.m. and on weekends and only to individuals for credit card billing. It uses a simplified command language or menus and offers approximately 100 of DIALOG's databases.

Even though Knowledge Index was started over ten years ago, it never reached the potential originally envisioned. DIALOG found not only that the home end user market is difficult to reach but that the credit card billing for relatively small amounts and disproportionate number of questions for customer service detracted from services for its main, professional audiences. According to a DIALOG spokesperson, "We were never geared up to serve the consumer market. DIALOG has an interest in the home market, but the best way to serve them is with a third party like CompuServe."

CompuServe is a more natural venue for Knowledge Index. It knows the home market—its primary market for almost 15 years. Now with more than one million customers, CompuServe is accustomed to hundreds of thousands of small bills, rather than the thousands of relatively large ones that DIALOG relies on. Its customer service staff is now receiving Knowledge Index training and will be the first line for customer questions. DIALOG will serve as backup.

CLASSMATE, DIALOG's online program for elementary and high schools, uses the Knowledge Index software but will be unaffected by the move. CLASSMATE schools will continue to deal directly with DIALOG.

Already the amount of shifting by familiar faces in 1993 portends an unsettled but interesting year in the database industry. Good luck to all the familiar faces in their new milieu; all of us old faces are watching.