

ONLINE DATABASES
Vendors and Search Engines

By Carol Tenopir

AT FIRST IT SEEMED INEVITABLE that free search engines would compete with fee-based online services. Now they work together.

Although still in beta-test mode, Yahoo Subscriptions works with many publishers and online services to index their fee-based content. Factiva, LexisNexis, and Thomson Gale allow Yahoo Subscriptions to deliver searches of some proprietary content. Yahoo searching is free up to the point of full text. A searcher needs a password to see the full text. Users are prompted to expand their search to the open web for instant access to free results.

Primary publishers and professional societies make content searchable through Yahoo Subscriptions. IEEE and ACM allow Yahoo to search the indexes to their journals. *New England Journal of Medicine*, *Financial Times*, and *Consumer Reports* index materials for the general public and scholars.

Yahoo Subscriptions is not for casual web searchers. To use it a searcher must recognize and choose a specific system. The searcher needs a password for each source. LexisNexis searches go to the "LexisNexis AlaCarte!" service at $3 per article. It targets small firms and independent information professionals.

A subset for Yahoo

After conducting research on what people search for, Factiva used its "intelligent indexing" terms to develop a subset for Yahoo Subscriptions. This selected content includes sports, entertainment, health and science, education, and local government. Factiva hopes to attract new subscribers while it builds easier access for current users who may pop in and out of Yahoo.

Thomson Gale launched "Access MyLibrary.com," a subset of InfoTrac designed for web crawling, about the same time that Yahoo Subscriptions began, and the two services work well together. Users familiar with Gale can get to the InfoTrac indexing through Yahoo Subscriptions, while others can find it through general search engines such as Google. Users must be affiliated with institutions that subscribe to InfoTrac to get access to full texts. AccessMyLibrary authenticates subscriber libraries. Gale will add remaining InfoTrac periodical titles, then Reference E-Books and virtual reference library collections.

Consumer Reports and *New England Journal of Medicine* services direct Yahoo Subscription users to their full subscription-based online service. Others provide access to materials only within a set date range. For example, IEEE provides full access only to technical articles since 1988. The *Wall Street Journal* restricts access to articles from the past 30 days that include information about companies publicly traded in the United States. Some services, like IEEE or Factiva, provide free abstracts or summaries of selected titles but go to the password screen when a title is selected.

Is there any reason to use Yahoo Subscriptions if you have a password from each service and can get more complete content by going directly to the source? One important reason to go this route is that a consistent, simple interface to content may help users. Infrequent users of proprietary systems are not likely to remember the detailed workings of each. Yahoo Subscriptions makes it easy to switch among systems without knowing the details. It is a great marketing tool for publishers. Special librarians can market it directly to their users when they distribute passwords.

Yahoo Subscriptions is not an exact equivalent to Google Scholar, which is narrower in scope and purpose. Google Scholar focuses on peer-reviewed articles, theses, preprints, and other forms in the scholarly literature, not the business news that is the preponderant material on Yahoo Subscriptions. Google Scholar is still in beta mode despite all the attention it has received. It isn't updated as frequently as some would want.

An edge in academe

Google Scholar's approach gives it an edge with academic libraries. It mixes all sources into its search index, making it a metasearch engine. End users don't have to recognize a source or a system to find relevant material. The identity of online services is lost, so Scholar appeals mostly to primary publishers.

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The relevance ranking feature using numbers of citations makes Google Scholar a kind of quality control filter. It is a powerful potential competitor to traditional indexing and abstracting services. Published versions of articles are presented first for those publishers that allow Google to crawl and index the full texts. Automatically extracted citations can be searched, even if full texts are not online.

If on-campus users work with a link resolver, Google Scholar lets a library link to them. A link to Google Scholar is on the library web page of some.

It makes sense for publishers, online vendors, and libraries to work with Yahoo and Google, often the first choices of end users, to provide better searching and access to their high-quality information.

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