

□ ONLINE DATABASES □

BY CAROL TENOPIR

Searching for Books Online

MUCH OF THE EMPHASIS of online bibliographic searching for reference use is on compiling bibliographies of journal articles, dissertations, or other research literature. The major online bibliographic databases provide access to these sources, only a fraction of which may be held by the library initiating the search. Interlibrary loan has taken on new significance. In contrast, typically a patron's search for books on a subject is done via a library's catalog, thus limiting the resources searched to those items held in the library (or to those items held by libraries in a region that share a networked OPAC).

OCLC's new EPIC online search service for reference use allows reference librarians to search for a comprehensive list of books on a topic just as they search for articles, with the added convenience of being able to find online which libraries own each book retrieved [see *Automation News*, p. 24]. EPIC's introduction this January made me rethink the options available to reference librarians for online searching of books, beyond those that can be found via OPACs.

EPIC

EPIC is an online search service, like DIALOG or BRS, for use in reference situations with all of the powerful search features you would expect. It offers Boolean logic with nesting, proximity operators, right-hand truncation, wild card replacement, range searching, search saves, inverted index scanning, etc. Records retrieved may be printed offline, downloaded, or printed online in a variety of preset or user-selected output formats.

Results can be sorted by the searcher's choice of author, title,

year, uniform title, language, etc. Searches can be restricted to any field or combination of fields (e.g., subjects and titles) or all word-indexed fields together in a basic index. EPIC's first database includes over 25 searchable fields. Like most major online systems, subject headings are both word and phrase indexed, so a specific subject heading can be easily searched or the subjects can be free-text searched by keyword. Titles on EPIC are also indexed both ways to make searching for a specific title more efficient.

Eventually EPIC will offer a variety of bibliographic databases, but for now it provides access only to the OCLC Online Union Catalog database. This database, long familiar to librarians via its limited search capability cataloging system, contains almost 20 million bibliographic records. Each record includes MARC fields plus holding information that tells which of the approximately 9000 OCLC member libraries have the item. (EPIC's many display format choices range from a full OCLC-MARC tagged record, to a standard bibliographic reference, to a short "browsing" display.)

Over 15 million of the records are for books, making this database the most important book reference available on any online system. The database includes other types of materials as well, including over one million serial title records, half a million audiovisual records, and lesser numbers of maps, archives and manuscripts, sound recordings, musical scores, and computer files.

On EPIC, the OCLC Online Union Catalog is fully searchable, making it a reference tool with many possibilities. OCLC gives examples of the kinds of questions that can be answered on EPIC, including:

- compile a list of all books ever published on a topic, or those published between certain years, or in specified languages;
- find phonorecords that include a specified song, played on a certain instrument;

- locate maps for a specified region or country and find what libraries in your area have them;
- locate the most recent books in English on a specified topic;
- find out if there are any AV materials available close by that depict a specified historical figure; and
- prepare a comprehensive report on all serial titles, books, AV materials, maps, etc., to do with a specified region of the world.

Users will probably be faced with too much information, rather than too little and strategies to increase precision of searches will be important.

The EPIC advantage

For book searching, EPIC's union catalog database offers several advantages over other databases. It is the largest such resource, including all of the records in the Library of Congress MARC files, plus OCLC member-added records for materials not cataloged by LC. (Approximately two-thirds of the records are member-added.) It is updated daily, with over 34,000 records added each week.

Catalogers have at times criticized the quality of some records, but for the most part the records adhere to standards of field tagging, subject headings, and authority control, things reference librarians know are rare in bibliographic databases. (Field tags and field treatment in additional EPIC databases will be standardized as much as possible to ease multifile searching.) The large number of OCLC libraries of course facilitates ILL and resource sharing. In addition to member libraries across the United States and in many other countries, the national libraries of Australia, Canada, China, and the United Kingdom have contributed records to the database.

EPIC is marketed strictly to libraries, primarily to OCLC member libraries, although use of EPIC is not restricted to OCLC members. By the end of 1990 it will support three interfaces, allowing end users as well as intermediaries to search the system.



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The first interface that was up and operational at ALA Midwinter 1990 is a command interface that follows the proposed NISO Common Command Language for Interactive Information Retrieval (Z39.58-198x). This interface looks much like other major online system interfaces. A search for recent films or slides (designated "media materials") about Franklin Roosevelt would look like this:

find franklin n2 roosevelt and yr 1985-
and pt med.

The other interfaces will include an easy-to-use menu-driven interface for novice searchers and an interface based on OCLC's CD-ROM Search CD450 system. Users of the CD-ROM system will be able to do preliminary searches on Search CD450, save their searches, log on to EPIC, and run the search online to get the most current information.

The Union Catalog is just the first of the databases planned for EPIC, eventually making it a full online/CD-ROM system in competition with the major reference services. EPIC will be available online soon and other databases are under negotiation or development. (The Union Catalog database is numbered database #23, the developer's lucky number, I'm told—no hint of how many other databases will be online this year.)

EPIC users can also get to the EasyNet gateway service through their EPIC connection, providing access to the almost 900 databases on 13 online systems available through EasyNet. EasyNet/EPIC users can choose to search with the Common Command Language or the menu-driven system.

EPIC can be accessed over the OCLC synchronous network on your OCLC-dedicated terminals for no additional telecommunications fee or with any asynchronous ASCII terminal or microcomputer with a 1200 or 2400 baud modem, just as you are using now to access other online systems. Asynchronous telecommunications are via CompuServe (\$7.89 per hour), and 800 WATS number (\$9.60 per hour), or direct dial (\$1.98 per hour).

In addition to telecommunications charges, OCLC members pay \$37 per connect hour, an online or offline print charge that ranges from 0¢ to 38¢ per record depending on format, and an annual fee of \$37.50. There are no monthly minimums for

OCLC members. Nonmembers pay \$110 per connect hour, online or offline print charges ranging from 5¢ to \$2.60, a \$75 annual fee, and a \$5 per month minimum charge.

EPIC has been under development at OCLC for two and a half years. The software was all developed in-house, which, according to Dr. K. Wayne Smith, president and CEO of OCLC, "has required a major development effort and represents a major accomplishment." In-house development was necessary to get acceptable performance from such a large database as the online union catalog, to guarantee full MARC records functionality, to support future plans for full-text databases, and to provide compatibility with the CD-ROM Search CD450 system.

The decision to enter the online reference marketplace and develop a proprietary system to do so is a massive financial and time resource commitment. Even though OCLC has an established client base and offers a unique database, they must compete with long-established reference online vendors, something that H.W. Wilson could tell them is not always as easy as it may seem.

For more about EPIC, contact OCLC Inc., 6565 Frantz Rd., Dublin, OH 43017-0702; 614-764-6000; 800-848-5878, x5040.

Other databases for book information

EPIC's Online Union Catalog database #23 is certainly the largest reference database for locating bibliographic information about books (as well as other types of materials). There are some other, more familiar options for book searching on the established systems that bear repeating.

The LC MARC-Books file is available online on DIALOG and Wilsonline (and through many CD-ROM vendors, but primarily as a cataloging aid). Online, the LC file is searched like any other reference database on the systems, allowing users to compile a bibliography of books on a topic or search for a known item. The file can be used for cataloging or acquisitions purposes as well.

On DIALOG, LC MARC-Books (file 426) is a weekly undated file with over one million records of all English-language books cataloged by LC since 1968. Books in other languages begin with 1970. The file is \$54 per connect hour with an offline or online print charge ranging up to 20¢.

The Remarc family of databases, produced by Utlis International, on DIALOG consist of five time-segmented databases (pre-1900, 1900-1939, 1940-1959, 1960-1969, and 1970-) that can be searched separately or together with Onesearch. Together the Remarc databases include over four million bibliographic records. Remarc and LC-MARC can be searched all together in DIALOG's LCCAT Onesearch category and duplicates can be eliminated with DIALOG's new dedupper feature. Prices for each Remarc file are \$85 per connect hour with offline or online print charges of up to 35¢.

Wilsonline also has the LC MARC-Books file, one of the few non-Wilson databases on the system. It includes English-language MARC records from January 1977 to the present. Costs are a maximum of \$45 per connect hour plus telecommunications and offline hit charges.

The other main book resource is, of course, *Books in Print*, available online on DIALOG and BRS (and on CD-ROM from its producer, R.R. Bowker). Online *Books in Print* is updated monthly and contains nearly two million records. It combines several print publications: *Books in Print*, *Subject Guide to Books in Print*, *Books in Print Supplement*, *Paperbound Books in Print*, *Forthcoming Books*, and *Subject Guide to Forthcoming Books*. On DIALOG the price is \$65 per connect hour plus up to 20¢ per offline print and is included in the Onesearch Books category along with the LC-MARC, Remarc, and British Books in Print files.

British Books in Print (produced by J. Whitaker & Sons, Ltd.) includes almost two million records (updated monthly) of books published in the United Kingdom or English-language books that are published elsewhere and are available in the UK. On DIALOG the file is \$60 per connect hour and up to 15¢ per offline print.

As the line between online database searching and online catalog searching continues to blur and as ILL services improve, book databases and services like EPIC take on new importance in reference work. The capability of searching for all types of information with powerful search protocols and the ability to locate the actual items easily will certainly improve library services and operations.

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