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Carol Tenopir
University of Tennessee - Knoxville

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Databases for Information Professionals

THE MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC databases for library and information professionals, established decades ago, have undergone major changes in the last few years. H.W. Wilson's Library Literature is now Library Literature and Information Science (LibLit) and offers a full-text version. Library and Information Science Abstracts (LISA) was purchased by CSA last year and has a new production system.

Information Science and Technology Abstracts (ISTA), however, is experiencing the most radical shifts. Last year it changed its name from Information Science Abstracts. Then, after a major battle to improve timeliness and quality, the product was sold by Information Today to EBSCO. It's time to revisit these familiar faces to see how they look today.

An improved ISTA

Since Information Today Inc. (ITI) purchased ISTA six years ago, the struggles to improve its quality have been well documented. The index purchased by EBSCO is an expanded and spruced-up version of what ITI took over from Plenum in 1998.

Tom Hogan, president of ITI, explained why he sold both ISTA and ITI's sole other bibliographic database, Internet and Personal Computing Abstracts (IPCA), after all the work to improve them. "In order for our two database products to remain competitive...we would have to make the investment in creating full-text databases.... This means setting up a staff to acquire electronic distribution rights from hundreds of publishers. We decided that the world has enough full-text aggregators...and that it would be better for us to focus on our core strengths in primary publishing and conferences."



Carol Tenopir
(ctenopir@utk.edu)
is Professor at the
School of Information
Sciences, University
of Tennessee,
Knoxville

The Dialog version of ISTA was part of Dialog's full-text linking program, and ISTA indexers include URLs in ISTA records when they have them. ISTA's Donald Hawkins explains that "many users don't have accounts with

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Dialog. ITI cannot offer 'one-stop shopping.' EBSCO, on the other hand, has a wealth of resources and a large complement of databases...[including] a large collection of full text, which it hosts and has rights to."

The future of ISTA

Hawkins will remain ISTA editor-in-chief. He hopes to improve ISTA under EBSCO, including coupling the bibliographic records to EBSCO's full-text repository, broadening the subject coverage, reindexing the back file to unify descriptor and subject code fields, and changing back file index terms to the terms in the thesaurus currently used for ISTA indexing.

From EBSCO's perspective, the acquisition fits right in with other offerings for colleges and universities. Mark Herrick, vice president of business development at EBSCO Publishing, says EBSCO plans to expand the titles covered immediately. EBSCO will add more library science titles and perhaps more technology titles. The goal is to create "a comprehensive 'Library and Information Science' index" that may more directly compete with LISA and LibLit. Full issues of journals will be indexed.

The sale takes ITI out of the bibliographic database business. Ironically, Hogan says he had his eyes on LISA as an acquisition target before CSA got it as part of the R.R. Bowker acquisition.

His idea was to merge ISTA and LISA. Instead, they will be direct competitors.

LISA and LibLit

LISA is implementing a new in-house production system that will add more fields to each LISA record, including author information like email and web site address, DOI, and language of summary for non-English articles. (LISA has always stood out for its international coverage, with journals in many languages.)

Eventually, there are plans to revise completely the subject heading scheme used in the print version and offer this as a field that will allow searchers to set up alerts for broad subject areas. Like ISTA, LISA now indexes electronic-only journals, and coverage will be increased. Relevant LIS web sites are soon to be indexed.

The most venerable of the LIS databases is Wilson's Library Literature & Information Science, introduced in 1921. A full-text version was introduced in 2000. This year the Library Literature Thesaurus became available to users of the new WilsonWeb system. Wilson's database still leads the pack owing to its high-quality indexing, full text, complete coverage of the journals that are indexed, and participation of an advisory committee for journal title selection.

Three's not enough

Even in library and information sciences, the database world is competitive. Each of these database producers provides many reasons why their database is the best. The three overlap in their core coverage, but each offers unique features. And these three dedicated LIS databases are not the only ones to index LIS literature.

ERIC includes bibliographic information for LIS journals and unpublished LIS reports and materials. NTIS covers government-sponsored reports on all topics but with a surprising coverage in LIS. INSPEC includes information science widely defined; Social Science Citation Index is another good source. As all good searchers realize, no one (or two or even three) databases are sufficient for complete coverage.