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Carol Tenopir
University of Tennessee - Knoxville

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LJ INFOTECH ONLINE DATABASES

BY CAROL TENOPIR

CSA: Not Just Science Anymore

ASK LIBRARIANS WHAT they think of when they hear "Cambridge Scientific Abstracts," and most, not surprisingly, would likely cite bibliographic databases in the sciences. That is probably why Cambridge Scientific Abstracts officially changed its name to CSA to reflect a broadened scope of topics and types of sources.

Part of the Cambridge Information Group (CIG), CSA now publishes databases and journals on many subjects and provides access to these and other companies' products through its Internet Database Service (IDS). Even librarians who hadn't paid attention to changes at CSA took notice this year when CIG purchased the R.R. Bowker Co.

Some 50 years of history

Cambridge Scientific Abstracts (www.csa.com) started nearly 50 years ago as a publisher of scientific and technical abstracting journals. Although it began to add new titles in the early 1980s, CSA's most aggressive acquisitions and expansion began only in the last five years. In 1996 it acquired Materials Information from ASM International and the Institute of Materials (UK); in 1998 the company purchased Sociological Abstracts publishing; and in 2000 it acquired seven new databases, including ABC POL SCI and ART-bibliographies Modern from ABC-CLIO. In 2001, CSA added Bowker's bibliographic databases and journals.

For many years CSA products have been published not only in print but also online and on CD-ROM through various vendors. Cambridge indexes were added to Dialog in the 1970s. The 1985 Cambridge CD-ROM version of Medline was one of the first CD-ROM data-

bases. CSA also became an online system and aggregator when its IDS came online in 1994. In addition to CSA publications, IDS provides access to databases from 24 other publishers.

CSA was one of the first companies to bet on web-based access, selling its CD-ROM division to SilverPlatter and choosing the web at a time when online competitors were still mostly using dial-up or telnet online technologies. The gamble seems to have paid off, as CSA has grown every year and the web is now clearly the platform of choice.

Target markets, main products

Jim McGinty, CEO of CIG, says that academic libraries are CSA's primary target market, but the company also reaches many governmental libraries. The CSA databases are used in corporate libraries but mostly through Dialog rather than IDS. CSA will refocus on the corporate market because it is changing and "looking more like the academic market" in terms of its pricing preferences. McGinty thinks CSA can do well in pharmaceuticals and materials.

Although they go beyond science, CSA databases remain quite specialized. They focus on life sciences, aquatic sciences, environmental sciences, materials science, sociology, aerospace research, art history, political science, and linguistics. Now library and information science, social sciences, and a bit of humanities can be added.

CSA's greatest depth and longest history are in the life, environmental, and physical sciences (and technology), with dozens of bibliographic databases on these topics, including Aquatic Sciences and Fisheries Abstracts (ASFA, compiled in cooperation with the United Nations), Conference Papers Index, Aqualine, Environmental Sciences & Pollution Management Database, Water Resources Abstracts, Aerospace & High Technology Database, and Materials Science Collection with METADEX.

Environmental Sciences has long been CSA's strength. Environmental RouteNet, a special service introduced in 1995, provides access not only to

CSA environmental databases but also to environmental resources from other publishers and annotated links to 500 environmental Internet sites. All resources available through Environmental RouteNet can be searched together.

The acquisition of Sociological Abstracts Publishing, with its well-known Sociological Abstracts database and companion Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts, marked the beginning of CSA's significant social sciences component. Acquisitions are continuing, so CSA now has databases in several specialty (and somewhat eclectic) social sciences research fields. Social Services Abstracts focuses on literature of interest to social workers; Physical Education Index is of interest to physical education educators and researchers; Worldwide Political Science Abstracts combines the old Political Science Abstracts database from Wolters-Kluwer/IFI Plenum with ABC-CLIO's old ABC POL SCI.

CSA has begun to dabble in the humanities. When ABC-CLIO decided last year to refocus on history databases, it also purchased that company's ART-bibliographies Modern, marking CSA's first offering in the humanities. This may not be just a fluke, as CSA added the British Humanities Index from Bowker this year. McGinty says CSA aims to add more humanities databases, either created or purchased.

Bowker acquisition

Reed Elsevier sold the R.R. Bowker publishing operations to CIG in August. The fate of the Bowker products is more complicated, as CIG immediately sold the Bowker directories—including *Literary Market Place*, *American Book Trade Directory*, and *American Library Directory*—to Information Today, Inc.

CIG has now split the other products among its companies. A new CIG subsidiary, R.R. Bowker LLC, is responsible for *Books in Print*, *Ulrich's Guide to Periodicals*, and the ISBN agency. It will keep not only the Bowker name but also the Bowker offices in New Jersey. McGinty says it has been a



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

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very "untraumatic" transition, as most of the Bowker employees and the entire management team remain. CSA will get the remaining products, including 11 primary journals and four databases, including LISA: Library and Information Science Abstracts.

Databases alone insufficient

For most libraries, reliance on CSA databases alone is insufficient. LISA, ASFA, METADEX, and Sociological Abstracts may be considered "must-haves" in their respective fields, but with these exceptions or for certain highly specialized topics, CSA databases are mostly supplemental rather than essential. CSA's IDS attempts to solve that problem by providing access to databases from many other database publishers in addition to CSA anchor products.

In science and technology, IDS provides access to major databases such as Medline, NTIS, Zoological Record, Agricola, GeoRef, and Weldasearch. In the social sciences, additional important titles offered include PsycINFO, PAIS International, ERIC, EconLit, and Information Science Abstracts. The humanities remain relatively weak, with only ATLA Religion Database supplementing ARTbibliographies Modern and British Humanities Index.

Many of these supplemental titles are also available on other online systems or, in the case of government databases like Medline and ERIC, for free on the web. As with most aggregator services, IDS adds value in the total package—the collection of unique proprietary and other databases, the pricing and subscription value, and the search features. CSA is trying to build value by aggressively adding links to full texts from many publishers.

Full-text links

Most of the IDS databases are bibliographic only, but links to many corresponding full texts of articles are being added. For several years CSA has been a leader in full-text linking and now has linking arrangements with a dozen organizations, including BioOne, CatchWord, ERIC's E*Subscribe, EBSCO Online, OCLC FirstSearch Electronic Collections Online, HighWire Press, Academic Press's IDEAL, ScienceDirect, and Swetsnet Navigator.

All together, these linking arrangements provide access to articles from over 6000 journals (and 80,000 docu-

ments from ERIC) for a total of approximately 12 million possible links. Since links come from such a variety of sources, the format of the linked articles varies, including PDF, HTML, SGML, or plain text. Terms and conditions of access may vary. Access to articles linked from OCLC FirstSearch Electronic Collections Online (ECO), for example, depends on a library subscribing to both CSA and ECO.

Strengths and weaknesses

Terry Owen, CSA's vice president of marketing, says librarians should consider the IDS because of value per search. CSA offers unlimited sitewide access for a single subscription fee, so high-volume users or smaller-volume users who purchase access through a consortium will realize a low cost per

Its acquisitions policy, emphasis on cooperative arrangements and linking, and improved search system are making CSA a growing player in the library marketplace

search compared with other systems with the same databases. We have found this to be true at the University of Tennessee. (Of course, the value depends on the number of searches performed, i.e., librarians must let users know about these databases.)

Virginia (Ginny) Tanji, librarian at the John A. Burns School of Medicine, University of Hawaii, has taught CSA searching to education, public health, and sociology students. She likes the simultaneous searching of multiple databases. She also tells me that "if you know how to qualify your terms with the field tags, the system allows you to conduct a rather sophisticated search." With the new "RefWorks" feature now under beta test, records can be imported into the EndNote bibliographic reference software, "which is a big plus," says Tanji.

CSA's search engine may be its

biggest weakness. Rather than investing in the monumental task of building its own search engine, CSA leases the AltaVista search engine for IDS. This has some limitations, as CSA has had to do much more customization than it wanted to, says a spokeswoman: "For example, we had to develop browsable indexes entirely 'outside' AltaVista, because AltaVista puts everything into one giant (but fast) index with no regard to specific fields.... Other modules such as Thesaurus and Z39.50 have had to be developed independently of AltaVista." CSA is exploring other search engines but doesn't expect major changes soon.

Much thought has gone into thesaurus searching on IDS. Thesauri can be accessed from both Quick Search and Advanced Search and can be displayed hierarchically, alphabetically, or in a rotated index. "Explode" is meant to search all narrower terms in a hierarchy. Even though all of the IDS databases are searched in English, thesauri can be displayed in French or Spanish to help users choose the best search terms. (The IDS interface is also available in French, Spanish, Korean, and Japanese versions.)

The thesaurus features don't always work as advertised, however. Alan Wallace, reference librarian at the University of Tennessee, compared ERIC on CSA with ERIC on SilverPlatter (WebSPIRS). He concluded that CSA was more up-to-date but that the "explode" feature "produced results that were not limited to the narrower concepts of a descriptor term," resulting in many false drops. Apparently the thesaurus features need a bit more work.

Take another look

Librarians are beginning to take notice of changes to CSA. Readers of the *Charleston Advisor* newsletter voted CSA as one of the most improved products of 2001, in addition to best content, best pricing, best contract options, and best customer support.

CSA's Internet Database Service is not for every library—the nature of its databases tells you that. If your users need access to a variety of scientific, technical, and social sciences databases, take a look at CSA. The company's aggressive acquisitions policy, emphasis on cooperative arrangements and linking, and improved search system are making it a growing player in the library marketplace.