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Knight-Ridder’s Shopping Spreep

WHEN KNIGHT-RIDDER bought DI- 
ALOG in 1988, most librarians agreed it 
was a good move. Certainly Knight-Rid- 
der had more of a presence in the infor-
mation business as a publisher of new-
papers than DIALOG’s founder and for-
mer owner, Lockheed Missiles and Space 
Corporation. In the last few years Knight-
Ridder has continued to make acquisi-
tions and enter into joint ventures that ex-
 pand its role in the information world. 
With its recently announced purchase of 
CARL Corporation and UnCover Co., 
Knight-Ridder Information, Inc. (KRII) 
adds library automation software and ex-
panded document delivery to its panoply 
of services for information professionals.

CARL and UnCover  
CARL represents a new direction for 
KRII. CARL customers work primarily 
in academic and public libraries that 
purchase the CARL software system 
for library automation. CARL libraries 
also act as a consortium, sharing access 
to leased external information resources 
as well as to each other’s internal cata-
llog information. Founded as the Col-
orado Alliance of Research Libraries, 
CARL includes libraries that still re-
semble a consortium rather than just 
customers of a commercial venture.

Selling and maintaining library au-
tomation systems is something that KRII 
has never done before. Nor is the com-
pany accustomed to working with CARL 
members: a group of librarians very vocal 
in their participation. Patrick Tierney, 
CEO of KRII, told me he wants the CARL 
member libraries to have a continuing voice 
in decisions and directions, even though 
member library representatives will no 
longer make up the organization’s Board of 
Directors. Tierney said, “We hope to pre-
serve the sense of community” with CARL 
libraries. KRII has “always done a signifi-
 cant amount of business with public and 
academic libraries and wants to do more.” 
CARL CEO Ward Shaw had told LJ in 
an earlier interview that “we’re not antici-
 pating any staff changes, we are staying 
as the CARL Corporation, and we’re stay-
ing in Denver.” CARL hopes to ben-
 efit from Knight-Ridder’s strong presence 
in the corporate library market and from 
its resources and personnel, allowing fur-
ther technical development. What re-
ally attracted Knight-Ridder to CARL 
was UnCover—CARL’s sister periodi-
cal and document delivery service.

A perfect fit 
An expanded document delivery ser-
vice fits perfectly into KRII’s plans. For 
years DIALOG handled document deliv-
er by passing on DialOrder E-mail orders 
to independent document suppliers. In 1993 
it acquired Information On Demand, one of 
the major independent document suppliers. 

KR SourceOne, launched in 1994, trans-
formed DIALOG into a direct document 
supplier. Originally SourceOne was a joint 
venture with Article Express International, 
the document supply arm of Engineering 
Information, Inc. Article Express houses 
some scanned image collections, such as 
patents, plus a print collection and a net-
work of “runners” that obtain and copy 
documents not in the captive collections. 

DIALOG bought Article Express Interna-
tional outright in October 1994, taking di-
rect control of the document base assem-
bled by Engineering Information. 

Customers of KR SourceOne place an 
online order for any document (whether 
or not it is found in a DIALOG search). 
Documents can then be delivered via 
FAX, U.S. mail, Express Mail, or, as of 
September 1995, via Internet to any E-
mail address specified. Copyright pay-
ments are built into the service.

Like KRII, UnCover has been build-
ing its digitized document collection by 
working with libraries and publishers. 
Joining the two services and the two 
document collections should greatly en-
hance the document base and turn-
around time of SourceOne.

Online services  
Online searching is still KRII’s major 
business. DIALOG was the flagship ser-
vice when Knight-Ridder took over and re-
mains so today. DataStar, purchased in 
1993 from Motor-Columbus of Switzer-
land, is KRII’s other online service. Data-
Star brings European markets and Euro-
pean business resources to KRII. Today, 
almost half of its online business comes 
from outside the United States, and Tier-
ney says the non-U.S. online searching is 
“the fastest-growing part of our business.”

For years Knight-Ridder has been 
rumored to be merging its DIALOG and 
DataStar online services. But devout 
DIALOG users want to keep the same 
commands and functionality they know, 
as do avid DataStar searches. Merging 
the best of both into a single system 
seems to appeal to neither group. In-
stead, KRII has developed Windows-
based front-end software to provide 
searching of both DIALOG and Data-
Star with a single graphical user interface 
(GUI). Probase was released in Europe 
early this year and will be launched in 
the United States early in 1996.

Probase is aimed at information 
professionals to make “power searching” 
easier by helping the searcher choose 
appropriate databases and integrating 
all of the important but nitpicky infor-
mation about each individual database. 
Without Probase, DIALOG searchers 
now must check the database blue-
prints to find field labels, limiting fea-
tures, output choices, or unique sorting 
or searching features for each database.

Probase will allow searchers to use 
all of the DIALOG or DataStar search 
features. For example, DIALOG’s mul-
tifile search feature called Oneseach 
works differently from DataStar’s fea-
ture called StarSearch. With Probase ei-
ther feature can be used on both systems.

International opportunities  
With online services being KRII’s 
major focus for international growth, 
the company expanded its presence in 
Mexico by installing a DIALOG office 
where a single independent DIALOG 
representative had been. Some other
countries are still served by independent "partners," but KRII would like to have closer relationships.

DataStar has provided information of local interest and an established customer base in Europe. "If we could find an [online] business in Asia or Latin America, we'd buy it in a second," says Tierney. In Canada, local content is handled through a joint venture agreement forged in 1994 between Southam Electronic Publishing and DIALOG. The collaboration offers InfoMart DIALOG in Canada, which combines Canadian information in InfoMart with global information in DIALOG. Canadian customers obtain it as a single service.

Part of KRII's global strategy is to continue to acquire local content for each region. "Scientific and technical literature is truly global, but that is not true on the business side," said Libby Trudell, VP of information professional market development at KRII. "Business information needs to be in the local language and from local sources." She envisions more arrangements where local information will be stored at the country of origin, with seamless links to the full DIALOG or DataStar service. Probase will have localized interfaces in local languages to make searching easier.

Knight-Ridder is expanding its portfolio of international services with Global Reach, now alpha testing. It uses the Personal Library Software (PLS) relevance ranking search engine and will allow customers to use an Internet browser like Netscape to gain access to content. PLS is an independent software company that provides search engines for a variety of online services including America Online, Dow Jones News/Retrieval, and NewsNet (see "The New Generation of Search Software," Online Databases, LJ, October 1, 1993, p. 67-68). KRII, which holds a minority interest in PLS, is developing online and CD-ROM products with the firm.

**Minority investments**

PLS is only one of several small companies that KRII has made significant investments in recently. KRII is involved in a series of joint products with Advanced Research Technologies (ART), Teltech, and Individual, Inc.

ART offers customized DIALOG interfaces for end users within a company. Working with each company and perhaps each department within the company, ART designs an easy-to-use interface that points to selected DIALOG databases for specific purposes. For example, in a pharmaceutical firm, the ART interfaces for the Intellectual Property department may point just to patents databases. In the Research and Development department, it may point just to pharmaceutical databases.

Originally envisioned for small companies, the interfaces developed by ART have been more successful than anticipated. This past summer, more than 70 DIALOG systems were custom-installed in a variety of companies.

**KRII works mostly with libraries and information centers—with academic libraries, public libraries, or with companies that have the infrastructure of an information center**

Teltech Resource Network Corporation sells technical research, analysis, and information management services to industry. KRII and Teltech are planning joint marketing as well as new product development. Individual, Inc. serves as a third party to distribute and resell Knight-Ridder's news information as DIALOG Direct. It builds tailored current awareness profiles so information of interest to individuals will be placed automatically in their electronic mailboxes. Via the Internet, right?

**KRII's overall strategy**

The company's global vision is of "information enabled companies," with KRII providing different types of information for different levels of users. Online services, CD-ROM, and other local products linked to the online services, document delivery, and current awareness products are the four prongs it will continue to emphasize. A range of front-end GUI software products will make searching easier for all different levels of users.

This does not mean that KRII has visions of becoming another America Online or Microsoft Network. Explained Tierney, "We don't see ourselves as wanting to compete on the consumer side" with services such as America Online or CompuServe. "We don't see ourselves selling directly to consumers." Instead KRII uses third parties to reach and distribute DIALOG content to consumers. CompuServe now manages and provides access to Knowledge Index, DIALOG's after-hours, easier-to-use online system. DIALOG's BusinessBase, a GUI business information service, will be available on the Microsoft Network.

The Internet is "good news for us," said Tierney. He believes the online business will be bigger in 1996 because of the Internet and, specifically, the World Wide Web. Not only does KRII use the DIALOG homepage for public relations, distributing system news, and system documentation, it has some end user products distributed only on the web. ScienceBase is a web product that provides access to sci-tech content via a Netscape browser. More such products are likely.

**Where do libraries fit in?**

Currently 96 to 97 percent of KRII customers are librarians or other information professionals. Tierney says that percentage "will go down a bit but will remain our primary focus."

KRII works mostly with libraries and information centers—with academic libraries, public libraries, or with companies that have the infrastructure of an information center. According to Trudell, KRII "partners with information professionals to get to the knowledge edge." Company representatives find it much easier to work with one key person in an organization to develop a variety of online, CD-ROM, and customized front-end products for everyone within that organization. Trudell said she believes that her recently created position as VP of information professional market development reflects her belief that "the information professional is at the heart of our strategy."

Where will Knight-Ridder shop next? More small, aggressive companies like PLS and Individual, Inc., for sure. Since librarians are such an integral part of KRII's strategy, we need to make sure we let the company know what directions we'd like to see it take.

For more information, contact Knight-Ridder Information, Inc., 2440 El Camino Rd., Mountain View, CA 94040; 800-334-2564; 415-254-7000.

[In my October column, the E-mail address to subscribe to LIBREF-L was printed incorrectly. The correct address is LISTSERV@KENTVM.KENT.EDU.]