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LJ INFOTECH □ ONLINE DATABASES □

BY CAROL TENOPIR

Good-bye BRS, Hello CDP Online

REMEMBER BRS? In 1977, the Bibliographic Retrieval Service (BRS) joined the few large online systems as a lower-cost alternative for mediated online searching. Initially targeted to academic libraries, BRS quickly became one of the most popular supermarket online systems in libraries. With the addition of the BRS/After Dark end user service in 1983 and the Colleague service aimed at medical practitioners, libraries of all types were able to offer easy and low-cost end user online searching. BRS added full-text databases even before DIALOG did, and eventually it dropped *Bibliographic* from its legal name, reducing it to just the meaningless acronym.

But BRS began to sink in the late 1980s—a process exacerbated by its purchase by Robert Maxwell in 1989 and the subsequent bankruptcy of Maxwell Communications after his death. Losing customers, BRS repositioned itself as a medical online service three years ago.

Maxwell didn't quite manage to kill BRS, but with last year's sale to CDP Technologies at least the name *BRS* is dead. The resuscitated, revitalized system is this popular CD-ROM vendor's entry into the remote online arena. Much of CDP Online is familiar to former BRS customers, but CDP Online is not just a new name for an old system: it is the entry of a new competitor in the online world.

CD Plus

Those of you who follow the CD-ROM market probably know CD Plus Technologies, which has been distributing major databases on CD-ROM to libraries since the 1980s. In 1991 it won the "Product of the Year Award" at the International Online Meeting in London for its improvements in CD-ROM database



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compression techniques and its easy-to-use graphical user interface (GUT) design.

With the 1993 release of version 3.0, its software was renamed OVID. OVID now is available in versions of MS-DOS, Windows, and UNIX. The Z39.50-compatible version will be available later this year.

The OVID search software offers both an easy mode for novices and a command mode for more experienced searchers. It uses pull-down menus for many search options, with virtual "push-buttons" on the bottom of each screen to invoke basic functions such as combining sets, limiting, searching by authors, etc. Many of the software features make field searching easier. For example, a user can view the inverted index values for any searchable field and a database's thesaurus is available for viewing and searching. A unique "map" feature takes any words input by a searcher and maps them to the controlled vocabulary terms of the database.

Further, CDP offers magnetic tape leases for many of the approximately 30 primarily bibliographic databases on CD-ROM for local loading on Novell- and UNIX-based networks. The company is known for tailoring search features and displays to the uniqueness of each database and making full use of descriptors and thesauri.

CDP Online and its databases

The purchasing and revamping of BRS brought CDP instantly into another segment of the database market. Former BRS and BRS Colleague customers were moved over to the new online system last August. Entry into the online marketplace will allow CDP to offer more full-text databases and new services, in addition to finding new customers.

CDP has added a training department and will begin to offer search classes like the other online systems—something it never had to do with its CD-ROM products. The search documentation has been revamped and help desk hours extended.

CDP Online now offers over 80 databases, with more being added regularly. A majority of these are the medical

or sci-tech bibliographic files moved over from BRS, including MEDLINE, EMBASE, NTIS, BIOSIS, Current Contents, CINAHL, and AIDSLINE. There are also some social science or general bibliographic files, including many of the Wilson databases, ERIC, PsycINFO, Dissertation Abstracts, and ABI/INFORM.

CDP Online also offers some directory and full-text files, again with both medical/technical and general titles. Directories include Books in Print, Ulrich's International Periodicals Directory, Pharmaprojects, and Physician Data Query Directory. Full text includes former BRS stars such as the Comprehensive Core Medical Library, Harvard Business Review Online, and Drug Information FullText.

CDP plans to continue addressing the biomedical market but has expanded to academic and research libraries by adding more academic and general science databases.

The ability to LINK bibliographic records with the full-text records in another database was a powerful feature of the BRS system. The LINK command has been moved over to CDP as a print option (and the \$1.50 charge for LINKing has been eliminated). Full text in the Comprehensive Core Medical Library and New England Journal of Medicine are LINKed to their bibliographic citations in MEDLINE (and vice versa).

Software interfaces and commands

CDP Online improved its response time and reliability when it moved from the old mainframe environment to a UNIX-based networked environment. The search software is completely new—it emulates BRS commands and Colleague menus but is not the BRS software. Underneath the emulation interfaces is the OVID search engine. Appearances can be deceiving, since not all functionality is exactly the same.

Users can choose to search the databases with BRS commands, Colleague menus, or OVID's GUI. As of the first quarter of 1995, all of the 80 databases are searchable with any of the three interfaces.

ONLINE DATABASES

Experienced BRS (or Data-Star) users will feel comfortable with CDP Online's .. ("dot dot") commands. Colleague or OVID are easier and are best for infrequent users or for end users. Major commands remain the same, including changing databases (...c), returning to a search prompt (...s), displaying search history (...d), saving searches (...sv), executing saved searches (...e), and printing records online (...p).

Some commands work the same but now provide more information than before. For example, the ..map command in some databases displays an OVID map of suggested subject headings, the date scope command (...dt) will show the date scope note, the root command displays an enhanced index display of any field.

CDP online has introduced new commands or simply changed what the existing ones can do. Many of these improve the online use and functionality of the thesauri available with most of the bibliographic databases. For example, ..tree displays the controlled vocabulary hierarchical trees for those databases like MEDLINE that have tree structures; ..scope displays thesaurus scope notes; and ..ptx (permuted) displays the rotated subject heading list. A field display command (...f) has been added to let users see a list of fields in the database being searched, ..h (help) provides online help at any time, and ..acct lets you change your password profile.

Offline prints are no longer offered. This means some of the offline printing enhancements also disappeared, including merging citations from more than one database into a single printout, identifying duplicates, and removing duplicates. Most of us won't mourn the passing of offline prints since they are a vestige of the days of slow modems and high connect costs. What we will miss is the ability to detect and eliminate duplicate records.

Software functionality

One manifestation of the BRS/CDP Online transition is a major change in the way a search is processed. CHECK THIS.BRS searched all fields when you entered a search term, resulting in the possibility of false drops—retrieving the author White, for example, when you were searching for the subject white\$. CDP Online is more like DIALOG in that only subject-related fields are searched by default. These fields will vary from database to database, but typically in a search for a term like white\$,

the system would search the title, abstract, and subject heading fields. Nonsubject fields such as author, journal name, date, etc., must be explicitly identified in a search statement with the proper field tag (.au., for example).

Not all BRS functionality was retained. Many of the software changes enhance the use of controlled vocabularies and thesauri and are especially strong for bibliographic databases. The same cannot be said of full-text functionality on the new system. CDP Online has reduced full-text search capabilities.

One change has to do with proximity operators. A blank between words

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in a search statement now defaults to an adjacency operator (much more logical than the BRS default to a Boolean OR). Adjacency can now be qualified with a number of intervening words, library adj10 automation, for example, and the words may be in either order.

Unfortunately, the "SAME" paragraph operator has been eliminated; CDP recommends using adj30 instead. The WITH operator no longer means within the same sentence; adj10 is recommended as an equivalent to within a grammatical sentence. The WITH operator is now used in the BRS online emulator for searching subject headings/subheading combinations in those databases that have this structure. In MEDLINE, for example, the subject heading "aspirin—adverse effects" would be searched "aspirin WITH ae."

Automatic plurals and British/American spelling equivalencies (Plurals and Medspell in BRS) are no longer supported. In a step backward for full-text searching, searchers must once again always explicitly truncate for plurals and OR in alternative spellings.

Pricing

Online companies realize that customers prefer more than one option to pay for online access. CDP offers "pay-

as-you-go" pricing or fixed-fee subscription pricing. Pay-as-you-go is the traditional mix of online connect time and per citation output charge but with a heavier emphasis on citation charges.

In most cases, connect rates are lower than BRS rates for the same databases, while full-record charges are higher. For example, BIOSIS on BRS was \$83 per hour and 65¢ per full record; BIOSIS on CDP is now \$55 per hour and 85¢ per full record. MEDLINE on BRS was \$33 per hour and 15¢ per full record; MEDLINE on CDP is now \$12 per hour and 20¢ per full record. Telecommunications charges must be added to these charges—in the United States that is \$12 per hour for SprintNet and MCI (formerly BT/Tymnet) or \$4 per hour for Internet access.

Database charges range from a high of \$190 per hour for Pharmaprojects to a low of \$12 per hour for MEDLINE, Comprehensive Core Medical Library, Health Planning and Administration, and others. Many databases fall within the range of \$24–\$60 per hour, including all Wilson databases at \$36 per hour.

One reason BRS made such an instant impact in the 1970s is that it was the first online system to offer discounts for high volume use, a good idea that most of the other supermarket systems copied. Like its predecessor, CDP Online also offers volume discounts on pay-as-you-go prices, varying by how much use you commit to on an annual or monthly basis.

Charges consist of a CDP access fee of \$3000 for each concurrent user, plus a charge for each database. The database charge varies by how many concurrent users are allowed. For example, for the capability of three concurrent users, you would be charged a service access fee of \$9000 per year. Add to this cost the price for the database or databases you select—\$2600 per year for three users of MEDLINE, for example. A library could also choose to split concurrent use between more than one database. Fixed-fee prices include access via the Internet; access via SprintNet or MCI invokes an additional charge.

Originally, only users in the subscription plan could search with the OVID interface. OVID was extended to pay-as-you-go customers in the first quarter of 1995.

For further information, contact CD Plus, Inc., 333 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10001; 800-950-2035.