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ONLINE DATABASES

BY CAROL TENOPIR

Other Ways To Access DIALOG

WHETHER YOU ARE an experienced DIALOG searcher or are just starting to search DIALOG, as an intermediary you probably use the full command-driven system. In the last few years, many new ways have been added to access the databases. These new access methods are mostly attempts to expand to new markets, but several may warrant consideration by intermediaries as well.

Knowledge Index

Dialog introduced Knowledge Index (KI) five years ago to serve the home computer user. It is accessible only after 6 p.m. on weekdays or on weekends. Instead of the varying connect-hour rates charged by the databases on the full DIALOG system, Knowledge Index has a single connect-hour rate of \$24 (including telecommunications) for any database.

Approximately 60 databases from the DIALOG system are accessible via KI. These databases are labeled and arranged in the KI documentation in 16 subject categories, each having from one to six databases. Many of the major bibliographic databases on DIALOG are included in KI: AGRICOLA, ABI/INFORM, INSPEC, ERIC, COMPENDEX NTIS, Magazine Index, BIOSIS PREVIEWS, MEDLINE, and National Newspaper Index. Several full-text or directory databases are available as well, including Harvard Business Review, Books in Print, Heilbron, several Standard & Poor's files, Drug Information Full-text, the Academic American Encyclopedia, IRS Taxinfo, and Marquis Who's Who.

Until 1988, like the full DIALOG system, KI has been a command-driven system only, so a user can't

just sit down at a terminal and search it without some instruction. The command language is a subset of the DIALOG command language, with many of the same commands and some simplified ones. In 1988 Dialog is introducing a menu option for KI. Although searches done via the menus will take longer (and are therefore more expensive), the menu option is a nice addition for infrequent, novice users.

Databases on KI are the same as their DIALOG counterparts so such things as specific field searching, truncation, and Boolean operations work the same. Word proximity operations (e.g., [w] and [n]) work the same, but unlike DIALOG, the [w] operator is the automatic default if a blank is left between two words in a phrase.

Why are librarians interested in KI, other than for selecting a system for end user searching or home use? The main reason is the much lower costs. For \$24 per hour you can search the Magazine Index database on KI, which on the full DIALOG system costs \$84 plus telecommunications and online type charges. Using KI in the library environment may mean that you will have to rearrange scheduling, since it must be used only on evenings or weekends. It means that daytime requests can't be searched immediately. Use of KI as an intermediary service is only available with the credit card billing option. If your library does not have a credit card and needs direct billing of KI services, you will be asked to sign a rider to your KI contract that restricts use of KI to an end user service only.

Business & Medical Connections

Dialog now has two services aimed at specific professional markets. The Business Connection is directed to end users in the business community who need information about companies and the Medical Connection targets the health professional end user. Either can be used by intermediaries who need these particular types of information.

Both Connection services offer

menu-driven interfaces to the DIALOG system. The same computer or terminal used to access the full DIALOG system works, but the Connection services allow access to only selected databases; Business Connection to about 20 and Medical Connection to 28.

A Business Connection user selects from among five application areas, each of which will access appropriate databases to provide specialized reports in five areas: corporate intelligence, financial screening, products and markets, sales prospecting (finding names and addresses of companies), and travel planning. Experienced DIALOG users will be able to guess what databases would be accessed in each of these areas (e.g., Official Airlines Guide, Disclosures, Dun & Bradstreet files, Standard & Poor's files, etc.) but the system does not allow individual databases to be selected or excluded. A finished, integrated report is delivered to the user.

An important addition to the Business Connection in mid-1987 was the Company Name Finder. The Finder serves as an authority list of company names, especially important because different databases use different forms and one company may appear several ways in a single database and a user may not always know any correct form.

Experienced database users complain that because you cannot eliminate unwanted databases, there is no way to exclude those with high print charges, those that are not up-to-date, or those that are of poor quality. Still, as a simple way to get complex information, the Business Connection may be useful for intermediaries or end users.

Business Connection costs \$84 per hour plus telecommunications costs and varying data display ("TYPE") charges. The \$145 start-up fee includes \$100 worth of online time and a user manual.

The Medical Connection may be of less interest to intermediaries simply because it offers little that the full DIALOG system does not. It is essentially just a repackaging of data-



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bases that are of interest to the health care professional.

Either a menu option or Knowledge Index commands may be used to access the Medical Connection. Databases are grouped into four categories called libraries: 1) medical reference, 2) bioscience reference, 3) general reference, and 4) science/technology reference. Databases can be searched individually, all databases in a library can be searched, or all 28 Medical Connection databases can be searched. The medical reference library includes such databases as MEDLINE and Excerpta Medica; bioscience includes BIOSIS Previews, Agricola, Life Sciences, etc.; general includes such things as Books in Print, Magazine Index, National Newspaper Index, and Marquis Who's Who; the science/technology library includes SCISEARCH, COMPENDEX, CA Search, NTIS, and INSPEC.

Start-up fees are \$95 (including a user's manual and \$100 connect time) or \$145 including the DIALOG-LINK Communications Manager. Pricing is per hour plus telecommunications and type charges. All are at the same rates as the regular DIALOG system.

DIALOGLINK

Any of the services mentioned so far or the full DIALOG system can be accessed with DIALOGLINK Communications Manager, Dialog's own communications software. It is already in use by many intermediaries, now that over 80 percent of Dialog's customers use microcomputers as terminals. DIALOGLINK requires an IBM-PC or compatible and a Hayes Smartmodem or Hayes compatible modem.

DIALOGLINK is easy to install and easy to use. It comes configured with DIALOG access protocols for searching via the Telenet, TYMNET, or DIALNET telecommunications networks. Initially, users load their local network phone numbers and their user number and password. DIALOGLINK from then on does the log on. Intermediaries may have users present at searches without worrying about compromising their passwords. (Optionally, user numbers and passwords can be entered each time.)

Like many communications programs, DIALOGLINK allows searches to be prerecorded for uploading after connecting and downloading of

search results. Function keys take care of such things as break, turning the printer on and off, help, terminating the call, etc.

A companion Account Manager package provides easy record keeping for intermediaries. The Account Manager creates listings of usage by database for each search session, daily costs summaries, and monthly summary reports.

The two DIALOGLINK packages together cost \$149 (U.S.) plus \$5 handling. The Communications Manager alone is \$125. (The Account Manager cannot be used without the Communications Manager.) A demonstration disk is available for \$15.

Gateways

DIALOG can also be accessed online through several gateway services. Gateways are other host computers that pass you on to the DIALOG computer. They may be mere telecommunications switching devices or they may add some "intelligence" to the search process. An intelligent gateway provides help with database selection and, perhaps, search strategy. EasyNet, developed by Telebase Systems (see my column, "The EasyNet Gateway, *LJ*, November 1, 1986, p. 48-49) is an intelligent gateway that accesses DIALOG along with 13 other online vendors. Simple pass-through gateway access to DIALOG can be made through several online services, notably WESTLAW, OCLC, and RLIN. Access through these gateways would be advantageous if you use these services frequently or are used to working with their dedicated terminals.

Dialog OnDisc

All of the options mentioned so far rely on telecommunications access to the Dialog computer. Dialog entered the CD-ROM marketplace early in 1987 with the ERIC database. Later that year they announced OnDisc MEDLINE and OnDisc NTIS to be available by the end of 1987.

Although the OnDisc products are mostly thought of as ways to allow cost-effective end user searching, they can be used effectively in an intermediary environment as well.

The Dialog OnDisc products can be searched with an easy menu mode or by using the full DIALOG system commands. The command version offers intermediaries all of the advan-

tages of the DIALOG command language without the connect-time costs.

If you are a frequent user of ERIC, MEDLINE, or NTIS you can search and re-search them ondisc without incurring any additional charges—a great advantage if your intermediary service relies heavily on these databases. One intermediary user who used to search ERIC as many as seven hours per day told me that the purchase of Dialog OnDisc ERIC has saved her organization over \$1000 per month.

Ondisc searches can be saved and uploaded to the full DIALOG system with DIALOGLINK. This will let you get more current information (OnDisc products are updated only every quarter) or more retrospective information (you do not have to purchase full backfiles ondisc since full files take up more than one CD).

Searching ondisc with DIALOG commands will feel just as if you are searching online, without the connect-time pressures. Because you are using a microcomputer and CD player, there are some physical constraints, however. The hard disk will get full if you search for highly posted terms using truncation (such as EDUC? on ERIC). (Experienced searchers will know that isn't good search strategy, but novices frequently do not.)

The other limitation is response time. It is frequently slower than online, especially when using word proximity and truncation features. Although free-text searching works (and is often necessary), more use of controlled vocabulary makes searching on the CD speedier. The availability of the thesaurus ondisc with no connect charges encourages use of the EXPAND command to view and select controlled terms.

Videotape

Like BRS and WILSONLINE, DIALOG introduced an instructional videotape in 1987. *Introduction to Searching DIALOG* is not a new way to access DIALOG, but it is a new way to learn about how to search DIALOG.

For more information about any Dialog service contact:

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