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Online Professionals

By Carol Tenopir

DID you ever wonder who, besides librarians, does online searching for a living? Where are these online professionals employed? How many hours per month do they search and on what systems? These questions and others can be answered in part by the new Marquis Who's Who *Directory of Online Professionals* and corresponding PRO-Files database on DIALOG.

Last year Marquis mailed over 100,000 requests for biographical information to people on the mailing lists of online producers, vendors, periodicals, relevant professional associations, and online user groups. Many of you probably received several of these mailings because, as Marquis admits, there is considerable duplication among the lists. Marquis estimates the actual size of the online industry to be between 25,000 and 45,000 people.

Biographies of 6000 searchers

Roughly 6000 online searchers responded, providing detailed biographical information including their: name; current position; current online function; online experience; systems currently used; hours of searching per month; library type (if any); equipment used; databases frequently used; database subject expertise; consulting experience; speaking experi-



ence; electronic mail systems used; birth information; education; career history; career-related activities; professional memberships; creative works; and address and telephone numbers.

In addition, Marquis identified notable people in the field who must be included in the directory whether or not they responded to the mailing. The Marquis staff researched these approximately 400 biographies.

As in all Marquis Who's Who publications, the biographee-provided information is accepted as it is submitted without verification. Conclusions about the online profession drawn from the directory must of course keep the editorial policies and response to the mailings in mind. Only 6100 names out of an estimated field of 25,000-45,000 are included. Inclusion primarily depends on a searcher's motivation to respond to a commercial mailing. One of the advantages the database has over the printed directory, however, is that errors can be corrected and new names can be added in a much more timely fashion. The PRO-Files database will be updated quarterly and Marquis will include corrections submitted by the biographees and newly submitted profiles in each update. There will probably be many additions and corrections to the first update this spring, as searchers see the printed directory and online database for the first time.

The printed directory will be updated biannually. In August 1985, gal-

ley proofs of the current sketches will be sent to all biographees for correction and updating. At the same time, new entries will be identified through another mailing campaign.

Quarterly updates will make the online version a more valuable product than the printed directory. Another advantage of the online version is the ability to search any field or combination of fields to create statistical profiles of the biographees. Educational degrees and current position can be combined to find out how many searchers in the Marquis Directory have the masters in library science but work outside libraries. Hours per month spent on searching can be combined with years of online experience or current job function or even online systems used most frequently to begin to build a profile of searchers and searching habits. Within the limitations of the directory contents, many interesting combinations will help reveal characteristics of the people in this industry.

Searcher credentials

All 6,148 entries in the first edition were available for searching in the PRO-Files database (file 235 on DIALOG) as of January 1985. Before the database was completed, Marquis generated statistics of online professionals using about two-thirds of the records. This test file is believed to be characteristic of the entire database and answers some of the questions I posed earlier.

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Of the biographees in the test file, only 32 percent hold a masters degree in library science (46 percent attended library school). Nearly three-quarters of the biographees belong to a library or information-related professional organization, however, with the Special Libraries Association, American Library Association, and the American Society for Information Science heading the list. (This high percentage of professional affiliation may be because the mailing lists of these and other professional organizations were among the sources used to get biographical submissions.)

Where they work

More searchers work in the private sector than anywhere else (45 percent), followed by the academic sector (33 percent), government (14 percent), and all other (eight percent). Many of these private sector employees are not librarians, for only 19 percent of the respondents work in special/corporate libraries. College libraries employ 28 percent of the total biographees, but public libraries account for only three percent of the online professionals in the directory. Approximately 65 percent of the biographees work in some kind of library.

Not only are there fewer public library searchers (contained within the "other" employment sector category) than private company searchers, on the average the public library searchers spend less time online each month. Of the private sector searchers 26 percent search more than 20 hours per month, as compared to 17 percent of the "other" sector searchers. In government, 26 percent of the searchers are also heavy users and 17 percent of the academic sector searchers search more than 20 hours per month.

A majority of the Who's Who online professionals have between two and nine years of experience in the field (38 percent have two to five years, 28 percent have six to nine). Because online searching has been widespread for only a little over a decade, it is not surprising that only 11 percent of the biographees have over 10 years of experience in the field.

In connection with the experience figures, almost three-quarters (72 percent) of the online professionals are between the ages of 25 and 44. Since the average age of MLS students is usually older than the average college student, it would be interesting to also look at the number of years since their last college degree in addition to the age of searchers. Fifty-eight percent of the online professionals are women. The test file biographees came from 46 different countries, although the data collection method favored the United States and other English speaking countries.

The most popular systems

In addition to the personal profiles of searchers, the Marquis database provides information on the systems and databases most frequently used by the respondents. DIALOG is the most heavily used system by far, with 80 percent of the respondents using it. Over 50 systems in total are used by the biographees with just 20 of these used by five percent or more of the searchers and only 10 used by 10 percent or more. After DIALOG with 80 percent use, BRS is next most popular with 37 percent of the searchers using it, followed by SDC Orbit with 35 percent, OCLC with 26 percent, NLM with 20 percent, NEXIS with 13 percent, and Dow Jones News/Retrieval with 12 percent. In the top 20 systems are the consumer information services The Source and CompuServe and bibliographic systems such as Pergamon Infoline, Chem Abstracts, DOE Recon, and the European Space Agency.

Many online professionals do not limit their searching to a single system. The directory shows that 42 percent of DIALOG users also access BRS and 41 percent also access SDC Orbit, while 20 percent access all three systems. OCLC is used by 27 percent of DIALOG users, 20 percent use NLM, 16 percent use NEXIS, and seven percent also use Dow Jones News/Retrieval. In keeping with DIALOG's popularity, 90 percent of BRS users, 95 percent of SDC Orbit users, and 82 percent of NLM users also search DIALOG.

Although a large majority search DIALOG, these online professionals come from diverse subject backgrounds and search a variety of subject areas. No one subject is searched by a majority, with 30 percent searching business topics, 25 percent searching medicine, and 20 percent searching sci/tech topics. Between 10 and 18 percent of the online professionals listed search (in order): education, chemistry, social sciences, information science, life science, current affairs, psychology, computer science, and law.

Information about hardware used, baud rate, and electronic mail systems used was also solicited in the questionnaire. This type of information is probably already out of date since expert predictions in the industry have anticipated a major shift in 1984 and 1985 to searching with microcomputers with 1,200 baud modems. Tracing the changes over time in these areas would be interesting, but unfortunately because the burden of updating the information in a biography is on the biographee, many changes won't be reflected.

In the first edition of the directory and database, 69 percent of the respondents still searched using a dumb terminal. The remaining 31 percent were not asked if they used a microcomputer or

just a smart terminal. Only a small number (18 percent) of the test file respondents used an electronic mail system. Of those, most used either ONTYME (offered through CLASS—the Cooperative Library Agency for Systems and Services) or the BRS electronic mail service. Since DIALOG now has an electronic mail system, I am sure these figures are already outdated.

When searching the PRO-Files database, as when searching the Marquis Who's Who database, it is necessary to check the database documentation and DIALOG blue sheet. The database is highly structured, with each item of information about a person in a separate field specified by a unique additional index prefix.

The contents of each field make extensive use of abbreviations, not all of which are obvious. "Info Mgr" means information manager in the Current Online Function field, "spl-assn/soc" is the library type for association or society special libraries, "profl jous" indicates publications in professional journals, etc. The abbreviations make sense in a printed directory by serving to keep the book to a manageable size, but they are often a hindrance to searching in an online file.

There are also typographical errors in the first edition that can be overlooked in the printed directory but that will pose searching problems in the online file. In this first edition, the typographical errors may be as high as one percent of the total characters. The first quarterly online update should improve that figure in the database. Because of the additional indexes, use of abbreviations, and typographical errors, extra care in search strategy formulation is required.

Online directories such as this one have potential far beyond their printed equivalents. Many more questions about searchers and searching can be answered in the PRO-Files database by combining fields in different ways. The printed directory is limited to geographic, subject expertise, and online function indexes. The online PRO-Files database provides a fascinating picture of the online professionals included in the Marquis *Directory of Online Professionals*. Initially the PRO-Files database contains only the online professionals. Other directories of professional groups will eventually be included in PRO-Files corresponding to other Marquis directories underway.

If you are not yet included in the Directory of Online Professionals or database, contact Marquis Who's Who (200 East Ohio St., Chicago, IL 60611). The printed directory can be ordered from that address for \$85 plus \$3.50 shipping/handling. Included with each directory order is a coupon for \$25 free time on the PRO-Files database.

