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“Other” Bibliographic Systems

By Carol Tenopir

THE INSTITUTE for Scientific Information (ISI) announced, this February, that the ISI Search Network is no longer available. For two years the ISI Search Network offered access to databases produced and created by ISI, including some that were not available on any other system. In addition to the Social SciSearch and SciSearch databases that are available on other online systems, the ISI Search Network offered GeoSciTech, BIOMED, CompuMath, and Index to Scientific and Technical Proceedings and Books (ISTP&B) databases.

The system also had some unique search features not available on other search systems. The powers of citation indexing were offered in a “research front” feature. Users checked on *Index to Research Fronts* to find code numbers for many subject specialties. Each code retrieved a bibliography of articles that cited the core papers in that particular specialty. In BIOMED, for example, there were over 7900 research front specialties. GeoSciTech included 3500.

The Search Network’s demise is also surprising because ISI had realized that it is difficult to convince searchers to learn a new online query language. Their front-end database access package, Sci-Mate Universal Online Searcher, attempted to make using ISI Search Network easier by serving as a user friendly interface that highlighted the ISI databases.

New versions of Sci-Mate offer access only to BRS, DIALOG, NLM

Medlars, or SDC Orbit, but do not include the choice of the ISI Search Network. That may or may not change again in the future because the ultimate future of the ISI Search Network is still unsettled. According to an ISI spokesman, the system as available was on an experimental basis. Users suggested ways to improve the system and it was determined that new software and some restructuring would make it better. ISI has not yet decided if they will make these improvements to begin a new ISI Search Network.

When the Network ceased operation, “usage was low but growing.” ISI databases that were available on both the ISI Network and through established systems such as DIALOG were used more on the established systems.

Those same databases will continue to be available on the established systems. Two databases, BIOMED and ISTP&B, that were exclusively on ISI are now accessible through the German online service DIMDI. On DIMDI, the research-front feature is available only for the BIOMED database. ISI is still producing tapes that can be purchased for CompuMath and GeoSciTech, but these two databases are not now up on a commercial system.

For more information about how to access any of the ISI databases contact: Laura Weissenberg, ISI helpline, (800) 523-4092 or (215) 386-0100.

Apparently, neither the access through Sci-Mate nor the special citation analysis features could generate enough use to make the ISI Search Network profitable. Is its demise an isolated event or can we expect other bibliographic systems to cease operations? Can the other new online search systems survive in a market dominated by established services? Use statistics and an examination of some of the other new bibliographic systems may provide some clues for the future.

The continuing survey *Information*

Market Indicators (IMI) by Martha E. Williams shows that the established services still dominate full text and bibliographic database searching (see my “Online Databases” in the February 1 *LJ*, p. 156, for a brief description of *IMI*. For more information contact: Martha E. Williams, President, Information Market Indicators, R.R. 1, Box 194, Monticello, IL 61856). Public, academic, and special libraries all spend more time online and spend more money on the same major systems, all of which have been in existence for at least nine years.

Only five primarily bibliographic and two primarily full text systems account for most of the use and dollar expenditures by the library/information center market. (Numeric database systems are excluded in the first IMI surveys.) The five most heavily used bibliographic systems in 1983 were, in alphabetical order: BRS, DIALOG, NLM MEDLARS, New York Times Information Service, SDC ORBIT. The full text systems most used were Mead Data Central (LEXIS and NEXIS) and Westlaw. Since the New York Times Information Service is now absorbed into Mead Data Central’s NEXIS system, a total of only six online systems now account for almost all use of full text database systems in libraries and information centers. Mead Data Central and DIALOG are the most heavily used of these top six.

Eight other online systems are occasionally accessed by some libraries or information centers, half of which are strictly bibliographic database systems. The four bibliographic systems used by some libraries are the Chemical Abstracts Service *CAS Online*, ISI Search Network, *Pergamon InfoLine*, and *QUESTEL*. In no cases did any of these “other” systems rank in the top three in terms of online time or dollars spent by any category of user.

The IMI survey shows what sys-

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tems are most accessed by different types of organizations. The report surveys a statistically representative group of more than 500 libraries and information centers. Included are academic institutions, public libraries, government agencies, industrial firms, legal organizations, information brokers, medical organizations, and not-for-profit organizations.

DIALOG ranks first in usage and dollars expended by public libraries, not-for-profit organizations, industry, government, and information brokers. Although academic institutions spend more on DIALOG searches, they use BRS more. Medical organizations also spend more money on DIALOG, but use more connect time on MEDLARS and BRS. Legal organizations use Mead Data Central the most, reflecting the heavy use of the legal full text database, LEXIS. Because legal institutions use the most total online time, Mead Data Central ranks with DIALOG as the most successful online vendor.

None of the newer online bibliographic systems have yet made any inroads into the library/information center market. The success of BRS with its targeted academic library and medical markets offers some hope for newer systems, however. BRS ranks second or third for dollars expended by six or seven user classes. BRS is nine years old, but it is the newest of the systems ranked in the IMI report. It identified a specific market that was dominated by existing services, offered lower prices, and succeeded in that market. The time may be past for another supermarket system, but services that tap a specialty market and offer competitive prices could succeed.

The newer systems

The three newer bibliographic systems mentioned in the IMI report that are still in business do target specific audiences or specialize in specific types of databases.

The *Pergamon InfoLine* is especially strong in patent information databases. Pergamon produces the PAT-SEARCH database, which includes indexing information and abstracts for U.S. patents from 1971 to date. International patent information and patent law information is also available. In addition to Patents, *Pergamon InfoLine* is strong in chemistry and technology databases. It contains approximately 25 databases on various topics. Many of the *InfoLine* databases are produced in the United Kingdom.

Databases exclusively on *InfoLine* include: Electronic Publishing Abstracts; Zinc, Lead and Cadmium Abstracts; Dun and Bradstreet's Key British Enterprises; and Management and

Marketing Abstracts. Prices range from \$60 to \$120 per connect hour. For more information contact: Pergamon International Information Corporation, 1340 Old Chain Bridge Road, McLean, VA, 22101.

CAS Online offers chemical substance searching and access to the Chemical Abstracts Services bibliographic databases. The bibliographic databases contain citations from 1967 to the present. Unlike other online systems that have the Chemical Abstracts files, full abstracts are displayable on *CAS Online* for records from 1975 on. The CAS Chemical Registry file allows searching by molecular structures as well as by registry numbers and chemical names.

CAS Online bases its pricing on connect time plus information retrieved or on set monthly fees for academic users. The abstracts, structure searching, and fee schedules make *CAS Online* an attractive system for frequent chemistry searchers. For more information contact: Chemical Abstracts Service, P.O. Box 3012, Columbus, OH 43210.

QUESTEL, relatively new to the United States market, also offers CAS Registry file chemical structure searching through its DARC system. There are also over 30 bibliographic databases on *QUESTEL*, primarily in science, technology, business, law, and patents. Other than its chemistry databases, most of the *QUESTEL* files are produced in France, so they are probably of more interest in Canada and Europe than in the U.S. The European patent databases on *QUESTEL* together with chemical structure searching makes it attractive for some technical libraries.

QUESTEL charges a fee per connect hour with an additional structure search fee. For more information contact: Questel, Inc., 1625 Eye Street, N.W., Suite 818, Washington, DC 20006.

WILSONLINE, another new bibliographic system which is just beginning operation, does not yet show up in the library and information center use statistics in the IMI reports (See "H. W. Wilson: Online At Last!" *LJ*, September 1, p. 1616-17). *WILSONLINE* offers exclusive access to the online versions of the H.W. Wilson Company indexes that are so widely used in their print form in libraries.

Can they compete?

Can any of the "other" bibliographic systems compete with the established services? As ISI discovered, it is not always easy to compete in an established market. Searchers are accustomed to their familiar systems and must be offered real incentives to learn another query language. The established supermarket systems such as DI-

ALOG offer more database choices on a single system. Their search software is well-tested and proven. Libraries are often hesitant to commit money and staff time to training or documentation for new systems.

These other systems can offer several advantages, however. If a database publisher provides online access to their own databases, there are often lower prices for searching and increased responsiveness to a smaller clientele. ISI said their Search Network "guarantees you top-quality information because it is operated by the same people who produce its online data files. This means that we control the way the files are loaded and can be searched. The field labels and output formats are consistent, and the techniques for retrieval are the same throughout the ISI Search Network files."

The new systems offer exclusive access to some specialized databases. Subjects, geographic areas, or source documents not covered in the more commonly used systems are often emphasized by the other systems. If you have users with interests that match these specialized files, these systems are your only choice for offering online services to those users.

The big four bibliographic systems are not likely to be displaced by newer online systems. Many libraries will continue to use only the established systems. There is room in the library market for other systems, however, if they offer access to unique information at a reasonable price. Searchers and users must know that information exists, be willing to access it, and be willing to pay for it. The library and information center market is still the major market for primarily bibliographic systems. Until other markets are more firmly established, libraries and information centers will determine if other bibliographic systems will prosper.

Public access to systems

The Source was the only consumer information system listed in IMI as being used by some libraries or information centers. Several months ago I asked libraries that are offering patron-access to The Source or CompuServe to communicate with me. So far I have received three letters—one from an academic library that had been offering The Source but is no longer doing so, one from a librarian who thought it was a good idea but is not yet doing so, and one from a librarian who felt it wasn't a good idea. I would still like to hear from any of you who are offering access to The Source or CompuServe. Write me at: Graduate School of Library Studies, University of Hawaii at Manoa, 2550 The Mall, Honolulu, HI 96822.

