3-1-1984

Newspapers Online

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By Carol Tenopir

THE EXCLUSIVE licensing of the *New York Times Information Bank* databases in 1983 to Mead Data Central for its NEXIS system focused attention on online access to daily newspapers. *The Information Bank* databases are still available as a NEXIS database, but some libraries have been hesitant to become NEXIS customers. Other online search services that provide access to daily newspapers with general circulation are available for library use. Libraries may choose from a variety of search service vendors, to access either bibliographic databases that index newspapers or full text databases with complete newspapers online.

Indexing and abstracting

National Newspaper Index: Indexes of major daily newspapers are available on both DIALOG information services and SDC Orbit. DIALOG's *National Newspaper Index* (*NNI*), produced by Information Access Corporation (IAC), 404 Sixth Avenue, Menlo Park, CA 94025, includes indexing of the *New York Times, Wall Street Journal,* and the *Christian Science Monitor* from 1979 to the present and the *Washington Post* and *Los Angeles Times* from December 1982.

NNI indexes these five newspapers from the front page to back page, excluding only weather charts, stock market tables, crossword puzzles, and horoscopes. This complete coverage allows for somewhat esoteric newspaper items such as recipes, cartoons, letters to the editor, or movie reviews to be searched and retrieved. With indexing from 1979 and monthly updates, *NNI* is useful for retrospective searches as well as current event searches.

Daily indexing of the five newspapers in *NNI* is available in IAC's *Newsearch* database, DIALOG file 211. (*Newsearch* also includes current indexing of the other IAC databases: *Magazine Index, Trade and Industry*

Index, *Legal Resource Index*, and *Management Contents*.) Indexing of the Western Edition of the *Wall Street Journal,* the *Los Angeles Times,* the *Washington Post*, and the national edition of the *New York Times* is available online within 24 hours; the *Wall Street Journal* Eastern Edition and final Late Edition of the *New York Times* is available later. Different page numbers from different editions are noted in each citation so searches can be limited by the edition available in your library. *Newsearch* contains 15 to 45 days of citations. In the middle of each month they transfer 30 days of citations to *NNI*.

NNI contains no abstracts. Subject searching must be done on article titles, named people, or Library of Congress subject descriptors. *NNI* and *Newsearch* records are brief, so microfilm or hard copies of corresponding editions of indexed newspapers should be available in the library.

NNI is available on Computer Output Microfilm as well as online via DIALOG. *NNI* can also be accessed through a user friendly interface system called search helper (available from IAC) that allows easier searching of the IAC databases including *NNI*. Search Helper uses a microcomputer and software that leads the user through the process of search formulation before automatically logging on the DIALOG. Search Helper can be used by librarians who do not have a lot of DIALOG searching experience or by library patrons for self-searching.

NNI is a timely index to major newspapers and is accessible on DIALOG, the online search system most used by public and academic libraries. The computer output microfilm and Search Helper products are interesting support services, designed to make *NNI* more useful in the public and academic library settings. IAC may soon be offering access to complete newspaper texts. This enhancement will make the *NNI* database more useful, since a major frustration is the need to guide patrons to the complete text of the correct edition of each newspaper.

Newspaper Index (*NDEX*): The Systems Development Corporation's Orbit system offers the online version of *Newspaper Index* (*NDEX*) produced by the Bell and Howell Micro Photo Division, Old Mansfield Road, Wooster, OH 44691. It indexes nine major U.S. newspapers and ten black news-

papers, with coverage and updates varying with the newspaper. Covered from 1976 to the present and updated monthly in *NDEX* are: the *San Francisco Chronicle, Detroit News, Chicago Tribune, Los Angeles Times, Houston Post, New Orleans Times Picayune,* and the *Washington Post.* Coverage from 1979 to the present with monthly updates is offered for the *Denver Post* and *Chicago Sun-Times.* Covered from 1979 to the present with quarterly updates are: the *Amsterdam News* (New York), *Atlanta Daily World, Baltimore Afro-American, Bilalian News, Chicago Defender, Cleveland Call and Post, Los Angeles Sentinel, Michigan Chronicle, New Pittsburgh Courier,* and *Norfolk Journal and Guide.*

NDEX has no current file that is equivalent to DIALOG's *Newsearch,* making *NDEX* more of a retrospective file. Its coverage of many regional newspapers makes it invaluable, however. Like *National Newspaper Index, NDEX* provides bibliographic citations only. There are no abstracts of the articles and records are brief. Subject searching is done using words from the title, index items, supplementary terms that include personal names, and new subjects, and category codes that correspond to the index terms. A notes field indicates what the item is (photo, column, editorial, letter, review).

Approximately one half of the *NDEX* newspapers are also indexed in *The Information Bank. NDEX* indexes most of the contents of the newspapers, however, while *The Information Bank* often excludes purely regional stories or articles in the smaller papers that also appear in the *New York Times.*

Access to the full newspaper articles is an important consideration for libraries using *NDEX.* Some of the newspapers included may be too peripheral to be purchased by a public library. Searches can be limited by newspaper title to cut patron frustration if a library does not have some of the *NDEX* papers.

The Information Bank: The other major online newspaper indexing service is still *The Information Bank,* now available from Mead Data Central as part of the NEXIS system. The professional staff of *The Information Bank* continues to provide indexing and abstracting to create the database that is then updated daily on NEXIS. Unlike *Newspaper Index* or *National Newspa-*

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per Index, abstracts are available on *The Information Bank*. The *New York Times* is covered from 1969 to the present with 100 other newspapers and news magazines covered from 1972.

General circulation newspapers indexed and abstracted by *The Information Bank* in addition to the *New York Times* include the *Atlanta Constitution*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Houston Chronicle*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Miami Herald*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Seattle Times*, and the *Washington Post*. The most complete and timely coverage is of the *New York Times* with daily updates of the Late Edition. Coverage and update lag for other items in *The Information Bank* vary.

In my December 15, 1983 column in *LJ* (p. 2310-12), I mentioned the advantages and disadvantages of *The Information Bank* on Nexis versus the old *New York Times Information Bank* search system. *The Information Bank* on NEXIS also has identifiable advantages and disadvantages as compared to *NDEX* on Orbit and *NNI* on DIALOG. Advantages include the inclusion of abstracts, the availability of the full text of current newspapers on the same search system, and the more extensive retrospective coverage. Disadvantages include the selective indexing policy of *The Information Bank* that varies with the newspaper, high costs of the NEXIS system, and the fact that few libraries are NEXIS subscribers.

Full text systems

Indexing and abstracting services solve only part of the access problem, of course. Access to the complete texts of newspapers is available online to libraries through several search systems.

NEXIS: In addition to *The Information Bank*, NEXIS provides the full text of the *New York Times* from June 1, 1980 to the present. Updates are daily with each day's Late Edition of the *New York Times* available within 24-48 hours of publication. Included are all articles, features, columns, editorials, letters, and news stories, with selective inclusion of other items.

Items can be searched by titles, any word in the text of any story, or by assigned controlled vocabulary descriptors. The NEXIS search system is a powerful (comparatively expensive) system with many sophisticated, user-friendly features.

NEXIS also provides access to the text of the *Washington Post* from 1977 to the present and the *Christian Science Monitor* from 1980 to the present. These do not include assigned subject descriptors.

NEXIS is by now not the only online system for searching newspapers in full text. More regional papers are becoming available on systems that libraries may access if they choose.

Vu/Text: Vu/Text Information Services (P.O. Box 8558, Philadelphia, PA 19101) offers the full text of several newspapers in addition to the other full text databases such as the *Academic American Encyclopedia*. Although Vu/Text is a wholly owned subsidiary of Knight-Ridder, not only Knight-Ridder papers are included. Newspapers available on Vu/Text as of January 1984 include: the *Washington Post* from April 1983 to the present, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* from 1981 to the present, the *Philadelphia Daily News* from 1980 to the present, the *Herald-Leader* (Lexington, Kentucky) from 1983 to the present, and the *Morning Call* (Allentown, Pennsylvania) from January 1, 1984 to the present. The *Detroit Free Press* and *Miami Herald* will be added in 1984 and Vu/Text is actively soliciting other newspapers.

Updates on Vu/Text are daily, with most newspapers current within 24 hours. Vu/Text provides a keyword field and has a master controlled vocabulary, but each newspaper must decide to assign keywords.

The Vu/Text system allows free text searching on any word in any newspaper article, but it has some search strategy limitations at this time. There is no word proximity capability yet (Vu/Text promises such a feature soon) and parentheses cannot be used with Boolean operators. Symbols substitute for English language Boolean operators. Still, searching on Vu/Text is relatively straightforward and there is a valuable display option allowing stories that contain the most occurrences of search terms to be displayed first. Display can also be limited to only the page containing the search term.

Any standard terminal and modem can be used to search Vu/Text. Prices and response time compare favorably with NEXIS. With no contract for a monthly minimum, all daily general newspapers cost $90 per hour (the *Wall Street Transcript* is $295 per hour). A one hour per month minimum lowers the rates to $60 per hour for most newspapers and $75 per hour for the *Washington Post*. Volume discounts automatically occur after five hours per month at any one rate.

Why would such regional newspapers want to go online with Vu/Text? Donna Willmann of Vu/Text explained that "most newspapers decide to come up because their clipping files are a mess. They are coming up to have an electronic library inhouse for their staff." It is less expensive to come up on a system that is already established and with national marketing it may earn extra revenue to offset costs.

Libraries will have the advantage of being able to offer to access many regional newspapers that they would never have in hard copy. Vu/Text can expand the library's newspaper offerings with low up-front costs.

Info Globe: The *Toronto Globe and Mail* has been online longer than any other newspaper. It is available through the *Info Globe* system, the online information division of the *Globe and Mail* (444 Front Street West, Toronto, Ontario, M5V 259). Coverage is from November 14, 1977 to the present and updates are daily, with the online version available on the same day as the printed newspaper. Stock market quotations are available in a separate *Info Globe* database, *Marketscan*.

Controlled vocabulary descriptors are assigned by indexes to aid subject searching, but every word of the complete text can be searched in a free text mode. *Info Globe* is searchable via any standard terminal and modem. U.S. access is through Telenet or Tymnet.

The Dow Jones News/Retrieval Service: For very current, but selective information from the *Wall Street Journal* and *Barron's*, including stock market quotations, there is still no system comparable to the Dow Jones News/Retrieval Service (P.O. Box 300, Princeton, NJ 08540). News and stock quotes are updated continuously throughout the day, making the system current within minutes or even seconds. This is not a retrospective news search system, however, as only the last 90 days worth of news is available online. Selected articles from the *Wall Street Journal* and *Barron's* are retained back to June 1979. The *Wall Street Journal Highlights Online* includes headlines of major news stories, summaries of the front and back page stories, descriptions of major editorials, and summaries of the market page, updated each business day morning.

Dow Jones News/Retrieval is widely used by special libraries that often need very current business information. Of the newspaper databases, it is the most timely but probably of the least general interest.

More information

Online access to newspapers in their complete text or to indexes or abstracts of newspapers are readily accessible through these systems. More regional newspapers are coming online and choices can now be made by librarians as to what newspapers, systems, and amount of newspaper information will be available through the library.

Although there is information on newspaper databases in many publications, it changes so rapidly that published articles are rarely up-to-date. Current information about any database must come from the database producer or online vendor.