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More Publications About Databases

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More Publications About Data- Bases

By Carol Tenopir

SINCE the last discussion in this column of publications for keeping up with online databases (*LJ*, February 1, p. 180-82) several new publications have been issued. Two newsletters, a directory, and a textbook are among the sources that have been added to the prolific online database literature.

"Database Update"

Database Update, a monthly newsletter started in April, is published by Newsletter Management Corporation, publishers of *Tax Shelter Insider*, *Executive Productivity*, *World Money Analyst*, *Office Automation Update*, *Robotics Update*, *Consumer Clout*, *Computer Security Alert*, and many other newsletters. Each issue contains eight pages of up-to-date information on every type of database or search service. A sampling from the September *Database Update* includes half- to full-page stories on the Mead Data Cen-

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tral decision to allow ASCII terminal access to LEXIS and NEXIS; the purchase of GTE Information Services by ADP Financial Information Services; a new voice response system for home banking; database additions to SDC, DIALOG, BRS; information meetings for online professionals; and new developments with the BIOSIS BITS service. A summary of the Frost and Sullivan report on the U.S. database industry is the September "Special Report."

A section of "Database Update Briefs" has one-paragraph items on a similarly wide variety of topics. "Media Scan" provides a bibliography of articles relating to databases from the small computer popular literature (*Popular Computing*, *Infoworld*, *Creative Computing*, *Interface Age*, are most frequently cited). Each month the "Special Reports" page looks at a different issue in more depth.

Full of useful and interesting information, *Database Update* covers the databases and services most familiar to librarians, as well as the full range of home information services. Anything pertaining to databases or access to commercial online systems of any type seems to be within the newsletter's broad scope. Because it is a newsletter, no detail is given on topics nor are issues explored in depth, except in the "Special Reports." *Database Update*, as a briefing service, keeps subscribers aware of the latest developments in the industry. Contact names, addresses, and phone numbers for further information are always given.

The writing style of *Database Update* is clear and readable, the layout is attractive, and headlines in bold type and different colors facilitate scanning or make individual items easy to find. A front page table of contents also helps.

This newsletter is recommended to anyone interested in keeping up with the latest happenings in the online industry. Its focus on home information

services, the microcomputer-database market, and the telecommunications industry, and the online services and databases more familiar to most librarians offers a chance to keep current on a variety of services without having to go to many sources. It expanded my awareness of different database services while only taking a short time to read each month. *Database Update* is expensive (charter subscribers throughout the first year pay \$97 per year which includes a copy of Newsletter Management Corporation's *Guide to Online Databases*, reviewed later in this column and a semi-annual index). The regular subscription price (after March 1984) will be \$145 per year. The price is worth it, in my opinion, to those who want to expand their view of databases and keep very current without subscribing to many different sources.

Database Update is also available online in full text form with the *Newsnet* online newsletter service. For more information contact: *Newsletter Management Corporation*, 10076 Boca Entrada Blvd., Boca Raton, FL 33433, 800-3454-8112.

"Database Alert"

Database Alert, another database newsletter new this year from Knowledge Industry Publications, Inc., 701 Westchester Ave., White Plains, NY, 10604, 800-431-1880, is an 8½ x 11 inch format monthly similar to *Database Update*. Unlike *Database Update*, *Database Alert* generally limits its focus to the databases and online services that are most used by libraries.

Database Alert includes one-line to several sentence entries on new databases, changes in old ones, and what's new with the search services. Most of the information is in the form of announcements without interpretation or exploration of issues. The first page of each issue is a complete index to the announcement-packed inside pages,

important because this is not the kind of newsletter you will want to read from front page to last. Most readers will be interested in only a portion of the databases covered, or will use *Database Alert* as a reference tool to trace the latest news on a particular database. Numerous cross references in the index are helpful.

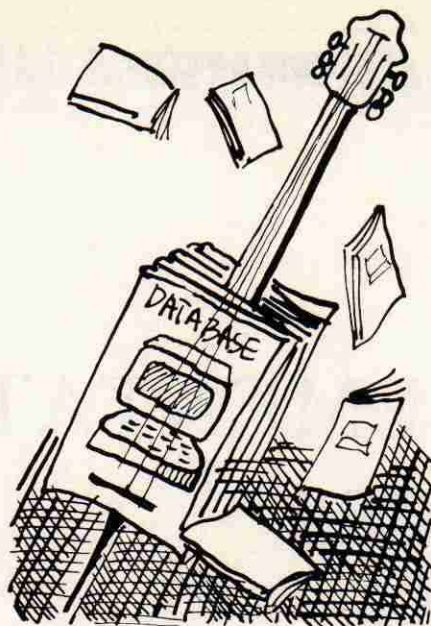
Issues of *Database Alert* vary from four to six pages, with the entire first page for the index and half of the last page devoted to advertisements. The content section of this newsletter actually covers from three-and-a-half to five pages, but with very little white space on each packed page.

Unfortunately, the layout of *Database Alert* is crowded and confusing. News items are not well separated and the typeface is difficult to read. Less interesting than *Database Update*, *Database Alert* reads like a compilation of new database announcements based on the press releases and newsletters from search services and database producers. I got bored quickly, reading this newsletter straight through, though it will be useful as a reference source to go back to for the latest information on a particular database. You have to be very interested in all databases to pay the \$68 for a 19-month subscription to *Database Alert*. Those who do will save hours of scanning of all the different search service newsletters and announcements. For readability and general interest I recommend *Database Update* as a first choice despite its much higher price.

“Information Hotline”

An older monthly newsletter, *Information Hotline* from Science Associates/International Inc., 1841 Broadway, New York, NY 10023, is a comprehensive and detailed current awareness service covering all topics in the information industry. It includes information on online search services and new databases in addition to many information related issues. Notice of grants, government policies or regulations affecting information flow, worldwide information news, general automation news, telecommunications information, and listings of relevant NTIS reports and other information-related publications are mixed with database announcements. Professional in appearance, the headlines stand out and the front-page table of contents allows easy reading.

Information Hotline contains a lot of information about information—possibly too much for those primarily after news on commercial databases. According to *Ulrich's, Information Hotline* is “for the expert, not the librarian with a casual interest . . .” but it ranks as “the lengthiest current-awareness service of its type.”



“Guide to Online Databases”

The new *Guide to Online Databases* from Newsletter Management Corporation joins the well-established William's *Computer Readable Databases* and Cuadra Associates' *Directory of Online Databases*. The publishers assert that *Guide to Online Databases* differs from other directories, being more “user-friendly” because “whereas other database guides emphasize the database itself, *Guide to Online Databases* emphasizes the informational subject you are interested in.” The major way the *Guide* seems to accomplish this aim is to put the subject index before the body of the directory. The subject index is also a bit more detailed and topics are included even if only one database falls under the category. In the main section of the *Guide*, databases are listed alphabetically by title with their index topics, a one-line scope statement, update frequency, and distributors and producers. Distributor addresses and phone numbers are listed in a third section, but database producers are not listed unless they are also distributors, so there is no contact information for many databases available on DIALOG, BRS, and SDC, whose producers do not also run their own search services. A note refers the user to *Datapro Directory: On-Line Services*, Cuadra Associates' *Directory of Online Databases*, or *Databases for Business: Profiles and Applications* by Mayros and Werner (Chilton) for information on producers, implying that the *Guide* . . . is not attempting to replace these more complete directories.

A paperback that appears to have been printed with a dot matrix printer, the *Guide* contains entries that are well spaced so the print quality doesn't make it too difficult to read. Still, there is definitely a look of economy format

to the *Guide*. As the free bonus with subscriptions to *Database Update*, it can be a useful addition to a library, but at \$69 a copy, most libraries should think carefully before purchasing the *Guide* in addition to or instead of others. All of the directories should not be necessary, and the others contain more information. More information can be obtained from Newsletter Management Corporation, 10076 Boca Entrada Blvd., Boca Raton, FL 33433.

Online textbooks

Anyone teaching online searching or wanting to learn about it can choose from several good introductory textbooks, and I listed five in February (*LJ*, February 1, p. 181).

Published early this year, *Online Reference and Information Retrieval* by Roger C. Palmer (Libraries Unlimited), like several of the others, grew out of the graduate course in online searching Palmer taught in a school of library and information science. The book concentrates on the major commercial systems, with almost half dealing specifically with SDC, DIALOG, and BRS, primarily as a “how to” search guide, but also offering some system comparisons. Except for the fact that this kind of information tends to go out of date quickly, the person who wants to teach himself how to search will find this concentration useful. One advantage of Palmer over the other texts is that it is the newest in this rapidly changing field. Specifics on available databases and search techniques for each system change rapidly. Discussions of the reference interview, principles of searching, trends or issues, and management considerations are still highly relevant, however, and these topics are better covered in the other books.

ABI/INFORM searching guide

Beginners and those who want to instruct others at searching the business literature will be interested in the new *Guide to Searching ONTAP ABI/INFORM*. Available free from Data Courier, Inc., this 80-page manual is designed for both beginning searchers and more experienced searchers who want to learn more about the ABI/INFORM database. Meant to be used with the \$15 per hour DIALOG Online Training and Practice (ONTAP) version of ABI/INFORM, it includes a set of 12 search problems for that file. The instructions on DIALOG searching, hints on search technique, and the description of ABI/INFORM also apply to the full ABI/INFORM database. The *Guide* is well-written, easy to follow, and attractive, plus being a great bargain. To order contact Data Courier Inc., 620 South Fifth St., Louisville, KY 40202, 800-626-2823.