Buy One, Get One e — or Has Print Finally Become Never, No More In Reference Collections?

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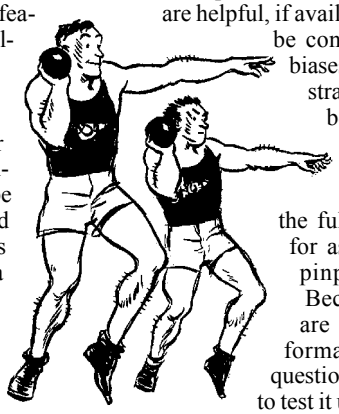
Since 1997 this keynote column in the reference issue of ***Against the Grain*** has asked librarians and publishers questions about reference publishing trends. In reference publishing, the first electronic resources were journal indexes. Now reference tools such as handbooks, dictionaries, and encyclopedias are available electronically. New electronic resources frequently combine features of dictionaries, indexes, full-text articles and links to media; the distinctions between types of reference tools is blurring. Many library users have never used print indexes, and they expect all reference materials to be online. These library users would find using a paper index to be as outmoded as being asked to use a phonograph-record player.



In this article, the rapidly changing world of reference databases — such as the numerous statistical sources, the collections of reference electronic books, and the database indexes to subjects — is explored. To address these issues the authors conducted an interview-style "joint discussion" among six librarians from five Universities. Their insights follow.

1) How would you define a library reference database? How do you discover what databases are on the market? In selecting databases, what tools are most helpful? Reviews? Database demonstrations? Trials? Word of mouth?

Stephen Bosch, Materials Budget, Procurement and Licensing Librarian, University of Arizona Library, Tucson, AZ: "A database is a collection of bibliographic or statistical data that is organized into a product with a single user interface that may or may not also contain full text. Generally we rely on contact with vendors, reviews, advertisements, etc. For larger products, vendor contact is the most important. Reviewing the content of the product, coverage, assessing price, and trials are the main components we use to select database."

James Burgett, Collection Development Coordinator, with Mary Vass, Team Leader for Reference and Information Services, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky: "In general, reference databases, like encyclopedias or dictionaries, provide factual information which can be used to answer some specific question or to verify factual information, such as the content of a citation. Bibliographic databases fall into this category, but these days even full-text journal collections may be used for 'reference' purposes. Professional publications, industry literature, fliers from database vendors, visits from company reps, exhibits at professional conferences, information from listservs and discussion lists, or often directly from other librarians who've been to a demonstration or read an article represent avenues for discovering new databases or improvements to existing ones. Reviews are helpful, if available, but often reviews can be contradictory and reflect the biases of the reviewer. Demonstrations are a bit more helpful because you can experience the product firsthand, and also ask questions. Trials are essential for testing the full potential of a database, for assessing its strengths and pinpointing its weaknesses. Because reference databases are intended to help find information to answer a factual question, a trial makes it possible to test it under 'real life' conditions, evaluate the interface, and probe the depth of its contents. Word of mouth can be very effective in identifying new resources, especially if the report comes from a colleague in a similar situation or someone who knows your needs."

Lynn Chmelir, Assistant Director for Collections and Technical Services' Washington State University, Pullman, Washington: "I still see differences among online abstracting and indexing services, online reference sources, and online databases with data like **ICPSR (Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research)**. Yet on our library homepage there is a listing for Databases A-Z that includes all these types of electronic resources and it throws in entries for journal packages like **ScienceDirect** to boot! It is understandable why the distinctions are blurring for our users! At **Washington State University**, selection activity is widely distributed among some 25 selectors. They all closely monitor publications in their liaison areas and discover databases in a variety of ways. All these tools are used under different circumstances. Often publishers' representatives or our consortial partners will call new databases to our attention."

Jennifer Duncan, Electronic Resources Librarian, Utah State University, Logan, Utah: "A library reference database is simply a reference work in machine-readable format. The basic notion of a reference tool, a resource that we consult in order to locate brief factual information or to guide us to additional material relating to a specific topic, has not changed. However, the rise of the electronic environment has invited us to include items in the reference collection that previously would not have been placed there. In the past, reference works were often so designated in order that they could be collocated for convenient access by librarians and so that they would always be there when necessary as reference items generally do not circulate. In an electronic collection, however, the hyperlinking structure of the Web allows us to locate materials in multiple areas of our sites. For example, according to traditional library organization, **JSTOR** would be classified as a journal collection—the corresponding print volumes are housed as bound journals in both our Science & Technology Library and our Humanities & Social Sciences Library. While we still make the individual titles within the **JSTOR** packages available through our e-journal lists, we also include **JSTOR** in our electronic reference collection because the interface provides a way to search across several journals by discipline, in essence providing us with at least limited indexing for areas that we are unable to cover with their own databases such as Asian Studies or Archaeology. Even though our budget does not allow us to add electronic products to our collection as frequently as we would like, I think it is very important for both myself and our selectors to maintain a good sense of what is available on the market. This awareness helps in constantly re-evaluating the existing electronic collection as well as setting priorities for when new money does become available. In terms of finding out what is on the market, I make a concerted effort to spend time at the exhibits at **ALA** and to build relationships with our sales reps. This way, even though my email and postal mail boxes are often overflowing, I am constantly being reminded of new products. Additionally, particularly when I am looking for a database to fulfill a specific niche, I often browse the Webpages of some of the bigger, more affluent libraries with a specialty in the area in which I'm searching in order to get ideas. Of course, the Gale Directory of Databases is always helpful. Finally, meeting with new faculty is an excellent way to find out what our researchers actually want to use and need for us to consider for purchase. We take this for granted in terms of finding out about research interests in order to make modifications to approval plans; however, we should also remember to take databases into account during this process. New faculty often come from a large university with many more electronic resources than we have access to locally, and they can have some excellent ideas. Particularly in areas with which I am not as familiar, faculty can be a great source of information. I think that each individual library

continued on page 18

serves such an idiosyncratic community that it is impossible to really fully rely on reviews or word of mouth in order to make decisions. Of course, I often use these sources to find out about potential problems and pitfalls with a product; however, conducting a trial seems to be the only way of really figuring out how a specific database will fit your collection and whether it will meet the anticipated need. I find that a longer trial—90 days at least—is most helpful for really encouraging Reference Librarians to make use of the product, hopefully with users who have real questions as opposed to conducting canned searches."

Edward Shreeves, Director of Collections & Information Resources, University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa: "Library reference database is not a term we would naturally use, so it would be difficult to define it. If I had to guess, I would think it might refer to electronic resources that perform the functions of reference tools found in a typical reference collection—A&I services, encyclopedias, dictionaries, directories, etc. But the accessibility of electronic information makes a distinction between this kind of resource and the electronic version of something that may reside in the stacks, or that has no print counterpart, meaningless. We discover what's on the market through publisher/vendor promotions, word of mouth, online discussion groups, and the like. The most useful tools for decision making are trials, and the hands-on evaluation they provide, word of mouth (especially from current users, if any), and demos—rarely reviews."

2) What are your criteria when selecting electronic databases? What are you looking for? Who makes the choice? What role do faculty and patrons play?

Stephen Bosch: "Faculty/patrons participate in trials and can provide feedback. Decisions follow the money. If a selector is using their money they decide. If a team is using team funds, the team decides. If library wide funds are used, the library CD committee decides. As far as selection criteria go, they are listed in our Policy for Selection and Acquiring Electronic Products and include issues like collection needs, cost consideration, product quality, and service and technical concerns. The full details are on our Website at www.library.edu/library/teams/irdp/elecpubre1.htm."

James Burgett with Mary Vass: "A major consideration in selecting a particular database is whether it provides unique information to which we don't already have access at all, or whether it provides electronic access to familiar resources which we have in paper. On our campus, bibliographers/selectors in subject areas identify and acquire the databases that are subject specific. In addition, a collection development team funds some databases that cut across numerous subject areas and have system-wide appeal. The reference team uses a portion of its allocation to purchase some general reference databases, such as directories and dictionaries, particularly those which duplicate paper resources already in the reference collection. The reference team also seeks funding centrally for databases that are interdisciplinary in nature or are particularly appropriate for undergraduates. Faculty and patrons often suggest new databases, especially subject-oriented resources. Generally, faculty are consulted when subject-specific databases for their disciplines are being considered, and they may participate in evaluating the product during a campus trial."

Lynn Chmelir: "Electronic databases are selected using the same criteria as other publications. Our collection policies, which are all currently under revision, are at http://www.wsulibs.wsu.edu/cdc/list.html.

We are looking for good products that are fairly priced to support the teaching, learning, and research at **WSU**. We try to avoid too much overlap and to leverage our other electronic resources. Library faculty who have liaison assignments are responsible for making selection decisions and they must live within their budgeted allocations. When interdisciplinary resources are considered, they often agree how to share costs. We make every effort to honor faculty requests, but usually they rely on the librarians to have anticipated their needs. In earlier days, there was more consultation; the collection of databases hasn't changed much recently. We are especially careful to check with faculty when we need to cancel a title. We get few requests from students."

Jennifer Duncan: "Primarily we are looking at the content and scope of coverage—how well does this particular database meet a defined need for our user community? If full text is an option, this is a priority for us. Of course, we prefer some interfaces to others and there is one particular interface that we will try to avoid; however, our goal is to make sure that the A&I is available to our researchers. Unfortunately, the ultimate consideration for us when acquiring a database is generally the price rather than full text availability or interface. Our budget situation dictates this and we try to use our Interlibrary Services to fill in the gaps when we are unable to afford the full text option. While an individual selector almost always initiates the suggestion to purchase a new database, the actual decision to acquire it is definitely a group endeavor. In our library, selectors are grouped into either the Humanities & Social Sciences or Science & Technology selector committee. These two groups meet monthly and are authorized to approve up to $5000 annually in ongoing money for the procurement of new electronic databases, provided they can identify a corresponding budget line to cut. Proposals over the $5000 limit are bumped up to our **Collections Development Advisory Council** (**CDAC**), which also meets monthly and includes the chairs of the Humanities/Socials Sciences and Science/Technology selector groups. **CDAC** can also initiate purchases on its own. No database purchase over $5000 is completed without the approval of **CDAC**. As I am sure many acquisitions folks will agree, it is very difficult to get patrons and faculty to provide input about the collections—electronic or print. Our trials are publicly available on our database pages, and I encourage reference librarians to try to use these products with patrons while we have access to them in order to solicit on-the-spot feedback. While we do try to publicize our database trials to the academic departments by way of the subject liaisons, feedback is often minimal. Since creating an electronic database evaluation form, I have seen input from other librarians go up dramatically; however, only a few faculty have bothered to complete the evaluations. Faculty are busy folks, so if any of them do take the time to communicate with me about a specific product, I take their input extremely seriously even if it comes only as a brief note; particularly if a faculty member comes to me and asks about a product to which we do not currently have access, I try to use this exchange as a public relations opportunity. Faculty members are often amazed at how quickly a trial can be established and are often pleased to have access to the database if only for a month or so, even if we can't afford an ongoing subscription. It is often faculty who will drive database usage—either through heavy use for their own projects or through steering their students to specific electronic products. Therefore, it is essential to continue to try to find new ways to reach out to them."

Edward Shreeves: "Our primary criteria are the same as for "traditional" resources—relevance to teaching and research at the institution. Secondary issues include functionality of the interface, user friendliness, overlap with other resources, user demand, technical requirements, license restrictions. At lower price levels choices are made by individual selectors, though licenses are centrally managed. At higher price levels, selections are often made by an advisory committee on collections, sometimes involving lobbying or a recommendation from one or more subject specialists."

3) What is your overall materials budget? How much goes into electronic databases? Does the percentage of money dedicated to databases continue to go up?

Stephen Bosch: "Our overall budget is $9.3 million of which $2.9 million goes to electronics. We cannot tell exactly what goes to databases."

James Burgett with Mary Vass: "Total materials expenditures system-wide for 2003 was close to 9.5 million dollars. Unavoidably, the percentage of the budget invested in electronic resources continues to rise. Up to this point, digital products have placed an additional demand on the budget. But I'm beginning to wonder, at least with respect to electronic journals, if we aren't approaching a watershed point at which electronic products will simply replace print counterparts in many libraries, and the competition for funds between the two formats will become less intense. That doesn't necessarily spell relief for stressed budgets, however, given the fact that electronic products generally come with higher price tags and have strings attached in the form of bundled packages and aggregator or publisher 'all or nothing' deals."

continued on page 20

Buy One, Get One e —
from page 18

Lynn Chmelir: "The budget in FY 03/04 was $4,943,362. We are expecting a flat budget for FY 04/05. We wondered that last year and did a study. We discovered that we are paying annually just under $600,000 for the titles listed in the Databases—A-Z list. We have also invested about $200,000 in 'one time' funds for things like the Humanities/Social Sciences Retrospective. Databases are paid from disciplinary serials appropriations. A few like **WorldCat** are paid from general funds. Individual selectors may decide whether or not to spend more on databases as long as they live within their budget. Like everyone, we struggle to afford new electronic reference sources. We used to buy reference books and keep them on the shelves for years. Now they are becoming a new category of annual subscription. The overall materials budget took a 3% cut in 03/04 and is flat for 04/05."

Jennifer Duncan: "For FY 2005 our materials budget is $3,726,306. Of that, $533,149 supports our electronic collections. Our budget is essentially flat although it can fluctuate artificially depending on how much money we get from student fees. For FY 2005, we will see an artificial inflation. We do occasionally shift to an electronic product and cancel the paper subscription. This change causes us to reallocate funds from our Serials or our Reference funds toward our Electronic Subscriptions. We are not receiving new money to increase the electronic collections."

Edward Shreeves: "In 2003-4, $8.5 million (excluding the Law Library). Roughly 35% went to electronic information in all forms. Amount and percentage continue to rise."

4) Does the theory of developing balanced collections apply to electronic databases? Do you strive for parity among broad subject categories i.e. the sciences, social sciences, and humanities? If so, how? Do you have a formula?

Stephen Bosch: "No, the theory does not apply since the market is skewed to STM (science, technology and medicine) and business in the first place. E-publishing lags behind in the humanities."

James Burgett with Mary Vass: "Electronic resources are information products, and therefore have the same function as monographs and print serials. A balanced collection is as important here as in the traditional collection. Primarily, selection and acquisition of resources need to be sensitive to the type and format of resources generally preferred by a specific user community. Obviously, the STM disciplines have a head start in developing and marketing electronic products, and those subject areas tend to purchase more electronic products than do the humanities, social sciences, and fine arts, all of which are still in a print-preferred stage, although that is rapidly changing. Parity in purchasing electronic products for each subject area may be a goal, but the fact is that there is not yet parity in the marketplace, with equal numbers of electronic resources available to all disciplines. The practical compromise is to try to assure that core resources, whether print or electronic, are available for each discipline. There seems to be no formula for this, balance being forged with constant tinkering and adjustment over time. As for the reference database collection, we do try to balance products to create good subject coverage, and would be particularly interested in new databases covering areas for which coverage has been lacking. For example, we were particularly glad to obtain a new online communications database from **EBSCO** recently, because specialized coverage had been lacking in the past."

Lynn Chmelir: "At **WSU**, electronic access has been warmly welcomed by librarians and our users. Although we don't have an explicit plan to maintain databases in all disciplines, in fact we do. Just last year we noticed a gap in coverage for criminal justice and were able to redirect funds to cover it. Our unit budgets were set some years ago and increases and decreases have been shared proportionally. The percentage spent on databases in a fund code is determined by its selector's perceived value. We do use usage data in making decisions."

Jennifer Duncan: "While we do not have a real formula for balance, we do try to make sure that every area receives some level of coverage in our electronic collections. The subject selectors are responsible for making sure that the essential needs of their assigned departments are met; however, because the strengths of our university lie in Agriculture, the Sciences and Engineering, and this is where the vast majority of our research dollars flow, we do tend to place an emphasis on supporting these areas. Inconveniently, electronic products in these areas are quite expensive, and as a result, our budget does end up being unbalanced in favor of the sciences. The **College of Business** also benefits from more resources than the other disciplines. We have accepted this unbalance because our **Business School** has a very large enrollment and actually has more graduate students than any other college. Once again, business products are extremely expensive and therefore consume a large proportion of the electronic product budget. We are conscientious about maintaining a core collection for the Humanities and Social Sciences; however graduate programs among these disciplines are not as substantial, so we cannot generally advocate for the most sophisticated electronic products in these areas. Generally, large purchases in the humanities are geared toward products that will receive much interdisciplinary use such as a backfile purchase of the **Historical New York Times** or the **EEBO (Early English Books Online)** collection."

Edward Shreeves: "No formula, but we do seek to maintain a balance in resource allocation among broad disciplinary areas that includes electronic information along with print. The level of spending for electronic information may vary from discipline to discipline, depending on its readiness, acceptance, demand for digital information."

5) Consortial purchasing of databases has saved libraries money. Have you been able to redirect these savings? Have you been able to keep it for other databases/materials?

Stephen Bosch: "Without consortial purchases we would not be able to offer anywhere near the amount of resources. We don't re-direct savings to non-electronic resources, but invest in more e resources."

James Burgett with Mary Vass: "Savings from consortial purchases have remained in the general budget or in a specific subject area. Money saved has been applied to other purchases, not necessarily always an electronic product."

Lynn Chmelir: "Any savings remains unspent in the fund code and can be used by the selector for other resources. It is quite difficult to try to calculate these savings although they are substantial. It's really wonderful when we can save by renewing a direct subscription via a consortial agreement! We never have a problem spending all our money!"

Jennifer Duncan: "We are extremely thankful for the good work of the **Utah Academic Library Consortium** (**UALC**). Through **UALC**, we have been able to have access to a wealth of databases that we never could have afforded had we been going it alone. Through **Utah Pioneer** (**Utah State Library** initiative for public schools, public libraries, and academic institutions), we are also able to gain access to our primary aggregator, which would otherwise consume the lion's share of our electronic budget. This year, the re-negotiation of the **Pioneer** and the **UALC** slates of databases added several new files to the statewide package for which we had been paying locally. The end result is that, while we did lose access to a few low-use databases, we came out ahead over $20,000. We anticipate using this money to pickup a few of the lost **UALC** titles as well as some new databases and electronic journals that selectors and faculty had been wanting. Because our statewide consortium picks up many general databases, we are able to use our funds for the specialized products that really fit with the curricular and research needs of our institution."

Edward Shreeves: "Certainly any money saved has been used for other information products, not necessarily for other databases."

6) Do you think the move to electronic databases should cause the wholesale discarding of print indexes? Has this happened in your library?

Stephen Bosch: "Locally, we are now beginning to drop print subscriptions and actually remove print from the shelves. Others may not be so quick to do this."

James Burgett with Mary Vass: "Print indexes replaced by electronic surrogates tend to languish on the shelf, no longer consulted by even the professional librarians. They take up space and require some level of maintenance. Still, this does not justify the wholesale discarding of these valuable resources. In the best of all possible library worlds, there would be a

continued on page 22

Buy One, Get One e —
from page 20

nationally or at least regionally coordinated effort to develop repositories or archives of such print materials, much as **CRL** is doing with **JSTOR** journals. Having these print indexes housed in distributed collections across the country would insure the continued preservation of the information they contain, yet free many libraries, sorely strapped for shelf and storage space, to remove them from the active collection without regret or guilt, as they rely increasingly on the electronic access to that information. As a fairly conservative land-grant institution, we have been very reluctant to discard print. Primarily, we have put into storage print indexes that are duplicated by online resources and are planning to explore opportunities to do some sharing of archival copies with consortial partners in the **Information Alliance**, consisting of **U. of KY**, **U. of Tennessee**, and **Vanderbilt University**."

Lynn Chmelir: "I am a little surprised at the reluctance to cancel print indexes. Many paper runs have been removed from prime reference shelving locations, but they have not been discarded."

Jennifer Duncan: "At the present time, many electronic databases cannot replace the backfiles of their print equivalents simply because the electronic products do not generally replicate the scope of the print. However, this pattern does seem to be changing as vendors add retrospective content either as an add-on to existing subscriptions, or, more often, as an additional product for which there is, of course, an additional charge. Even so, a host of factors would prevent our library from discarding the backfiles wholesale (although we have canceled many ongoing print subscriptions in favor of the electronic). First and foremost, until there is an archival solution for the electronic content of these databases, we consider the print backfiles as our insurance that the content will remain available to our users. Databases are in the crosshairs here at **USU** as we are in a constant budget crunch requiring cuts every year. While referring users to the print often meets with a groan, at least we do have a way to maintain a segment of the research collections. Second, it can be the case that specific print indexes have content that is not duplicated in the electronic versions. For example, in the case of **Mental Measurements Yearbook** (**MMY**), one of our reference librarians noticed that she was unable to get the 'Test References' field in the electronic version of the product. Upon contacting the publisher, I found out that they recommended that we keep the old print volumes because they were the only place to retrieve the test references that used to appear in **MMY**, but which have now been discontinued in the more recent volumes. Third, and we may be in a somewhat fortunate situation, we are not running out of space to house our print runs. Our library is in the process of building an **Automated Storage and Retrieval System** (**ASRS**), where we may end up moving many of our print indexes. Additionally, we are participating in a Distributed Repository for **JSTOR** titles with other academic libraries in our region and may consider including print indexes in this project. For all of the reasons given above, we do not want to completely lose access to our print index collection anytime in the near future."

Edward Shreeves: "It has led and I would expect will continue to lead to more cancellation of current volumes of print indexes, and removal to storage of backfiles now online. We have not yet discarded much material for this reason. I would hope to see some coordinated efforts, such as those currently under discussion by **CRL** and others, to preserve printed resources, including print indexes and other print counterparts to digital information, in a redundant system of light and dark archives."

7) If you were in a budget crunch would databases be on your hit list? Which databases, or types of databases, would be on your hit list?

Stephen Bosch: "We would be looking for products that contained significant overlap with other products, and would look to protect full-text content over simple index tools."

James Burgett with Mary Vass: "That's precisely the situation this fiscal year. And yes, electronic databases are on the hit list. Generally, targets for cancellation are those that duplicate others which we own. We compare the similar resources, try to determine as accurately as possible where the trade-offs are, and come to a compromise decision that retains the better or best of comparable products — based on campus needs. This applies to all subject areas, including reference resources. Usage statistics play a major role in the decision-making process, although other factors, such as uniqueness of the information, ease-of-use, reliability, longevity, etc., are considered as well."

Lynn Chmelir: "No, not really. A&I databases provide citations to resources that we may or may not own. We can always get something that has been identified as useful from somewhere else, but you need to know it exists first. Online reference materials get such heavy use that we would sacrifice other things first. If we were to cancel, it would be things that duplicate other sources."

Jennifer Duncan: "We are constantly in a budget crunch and during the past fiscal year databases came onto our hitlist for the first time. In the fall, we realized that the inflation rate for our databases was going to be a real problem in terms of our bottom line. Therefore, selectors were charged with cutting approximately $30,000 worth of ongoing database subscriptions. We determined that, because the cost of science and technology products so far outstripped the cost of humanities and social science databases, the bulk (about 2/3) of the cuts should come from science. The process was difficult, but I was pleased to see selectors working together to make sure that we maintained broad coverage for all disciplines and more focused coverage for the areas where our university's strengths lie. Additionally, databases supported by fee money and specifically requested by students were protected. I was able to provide usage statistics to the selector committees and the numbers revealed that, for two titles, we were paying relatively large sums of money for products that were used only very infrequently. We did manage to identify over $29,000 in cuts, representing nine database cancellations and one reduction in user level. Since the cancellations began in December, I have only heard of one patron complaint. In the end, this turned out to be a positive process because the electronic collection had never undergone any kind of systematic assessment."

Edward Shreeves: "We would consider databases for possible cancellation. We would look to those whose usage does not meet expectations, whose cost per use is unacceptably high, those which may duplicate information found elsewhere, those with unjustifiably high increases in cost."

8) In looking at databases that index journals, does overlap play a role in dropping database subscriptions? Do you use products like Serials Solutions to discover where there is overlap among databases? What other methods do you use? Do use statistics play into such decisions?

Stephen Bosch: "Overlap would be very important. We do look at **Serials Solutions** data; we also load file lists and do our own analysis."

James Burgett with Mary Vass: "Depth and breadth of coverage of the journal list are crucial to making a choice between two comparable products. Overlap and duplication can be deciding factors in retaining or canceling databases. Of course, there are always trade-offs since no two products are exactly alike. Again, the principles that apply to selecting print serials and monographs also govern the acquisition and retention of databases. Although we haven't applied collection description tools, such as Conspectus categories and levels, specifically to databases, I suspect that we are all basing decisions on what level of coverage in a specific subject area is needed on our respective campuses. Without this balancing of needs versus funds we would flounder at the overwhelming array of products versus the limited financial resources available. We have not used commercial products like **Serials Solutions** for comparing overlap, but have tended to rely on vendor-supplied spreadsheets, as well as on focused, in-house studies that go beyond title overlap comparisons. We try to take a comprehensive look at the products being compared, and evaluate 'eye appeal' (interface), ease of navigation, reliability of the product, promptness of tech support, downtime, etc. Certainly, usage statistics are very important, and they are becoming even more useful now that efforts like **COUNTER** are making them more reliable, more accurate, or at least more consistent."

Lynn Chmelir: "Yes. We don't have a service at present. Individual selectors make comparisons and often they share their work with disciplinary colleagues at other institutions. We are getting better at collecting use

continued on page 24

Buy One, Get One e —
from page 22

statistics for databases and would use them if crunch time comes."

Jennifer Duncan: "Overlap does play a small roll in our decision making process. However, examining overlap really only works if you examine the report title by title. Thus, preparing an overlap analysis can be quite a time commitment, although it is definitely worth doing. Many times the unique titles, the ones that we are paying premium dollars for, are things that we don't care about at all. As **Ken Frazier** has recently suggested, it is possible that students are choking on the number of database and full text options that we are giving them. While he was referring to the 'Big Deal,' I think this argument also holds up vis-à-vis the huge aggregator products that promise quantities of content that may or may not be useful to the support of the curricular and research mission at a given institution. Thus, and this is stating the obvious, 'more' unique titles doesn't necessarily mean 'useful' unique titles. I have recently used the new Serials Solutions tool to compare overlap between two products and I found it to be an enormous time-saver. I highly recommend it to anyone who has an overlap analysis project. We do use statistics but are always careful to take them with a grain of salt. Until we are set up to receive and interpret **COUNTER** compliant statistics from all of our providers, trying to compare the various vendor statistics just doesn't work. Additionally, we are far from certain that the number of searches or viewed full-text documents has much relationship to the value that our community is really getting from the database. There is one interface in particular that several of us believe has increased usage because it is so difficult to navigate easily, thus forcing the user to jump through hoops (conducting ever more searches) to extract information. Conversely, we declined to cancel an extremely low-use database deciding that we had failed to provide adequate marketing and instruction on the use of what we thought could be a key resource."

Edward Shreeves: "Overlap does play a role in the initial decision-making process, as well as in review for elimination. We have not used **Serials Solutions** itself or a similar product, but rather our own analysis, at least to date. Use statistics would play a role in that decision."

9) Do open access databases like Bio Med Central pose current or future competition to commercial databases that index journal articles or that include full-text articles?

Stephen Bosch: "Future, maybe. Current, unlikely. The open access initiatives are still in development and it remains to be seen if they are sustainable models."

James Burgett with Mary Vass: "Yes, ideally, open access databases will offer increasing competition for commercial databases, but whether they will ever pose a "threat" to commercial products remains to be seen. There are many complicated aspects to this topic, and I won't delve into those in this short response. Obviously, the library community still faces a significant challenge in educating the constituencies we serve about core issues in scholarly communication, including the cost of buying back the information that the faculty of our institutions have themselves generated, but have ceded to commercial publishers by surrendering copyright to articles published in commercial journals. Only when academic institutions themselves retain ownership and share liberally across the research and scholarly community will the open access model gain the upper hand."

Lynn Chmelir: "I think we are in a very dynamic environment here and really have no idea how things will shake out. As in most times of transition, we will see hybrid approaches for some time to come. You can use **Google** to find open access articles, but that searching lacks the selectivity that is one of the strengths of an A&I index. I think this issue is tied to the broader one of whether the journal issue itself will become meaningless when individual articles can be found as discrete postings on the Web."

Jennifer Duncan: "While I hope that the development of open access databases does put some feet to the fire in the commercial sector, I know that commercial database vendors will always be able to provide value-added services that make their offerings the premium products on the market. As long as faculty demand access to these products at our most affluent libraries, we will probably see the trickle-down effect of graduate students clamoring for similar access as they become new faculty members seeking tenure at less wealthy institutions. This is going to be a long-term process of educating both old and young faculty—across the disciplines and across the Academy as a whole. I am heartened to see a growing number of academics participating with librarians, publishers and societies in discussions about the problem of journal pricing. I hope that the issue of database pricing will soon begin to receive the same kind of attention. I feel confident that change will come, but that the process will be slower and more painful than we might like."

Edward Shreeves: "**BioMed Central** may pose competition to commercial journal publishers, if it can attract high quality articles and achieve sufficient prestige in the fields in which it publishes. I assume this is really a question as to whether open access journals can replace or offer meaningful competition to commercial journal publishing. It's clearly too soon to tell, but there seems to be some potential for it to affect the future of scholarly publishing.".