
What does electronic access to bibliographic information cost?

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It will probably cost more than you expect.

In the area of electronic access to bibliographic information the technology is changing very rapidly, and today's "cutting edge" is very likely to be outdated a few months down the line. Decisions have to be made in terms of what is available today, not what might be developed next month or next year. Costs also have to be figured or estimated based on present figures, which are likely to change tomorrow and which are also, in many instances, negotiated by individual institutions. Because of the rapidly changing climate, and because pricing is sometimes an issue which vendors prefer to discuss with potential customers only, and because many prices are based on the size of a given institution, it is quite difficult to compile a price list which will fit both various institutions and vendors. However, there are factors which will make significant differences in the overall price of various options for electronic access to bibliographic information.

There are also several different options for electronic access in addition to online searching. Only a few are considered here: loading computer tapes onto the library's mainframe, CD-ROMs in a network configuration, and gateway access either through a library's online system or through a separate workstation configuration. Not all products and vendors will be described, but rather examples will be given from the different options. Caveats have to be issued at this point: while some prices are generic, some are institution-dependent, and in those cases the institution used is the Univer-

sity of Notre Dame, with a user population of 12,000; prices and pricing structures change rapidly, so what is quoted today, may be obsolete tomorrow; negotiations between customer and vendor play an important part in determining the price of any product.

Tape loading

After a library has an online catalog in place and users have become comfortable with it, the next expectation is invariably the ability to search the online catalog for journal articles. While this is probably the most desirable option for electronic access to bibliographic information, it is also, unfortunately, the most expensive. This option requires not only very large initial investments, but also substantial annual fees. Assuming that a mainframe with a large enough central processing unit and necessary telecommunications and software are in place, cost components to be considered for this option are: additional disk space on the mainframe, since loading bibliographic databases will take up a great deal of space, especially if backfiles and/or files with abstracts are loaded; search software which will enable users to search bibliographic indexes through online catalog terminals, preferably by using the same search protocol as with the online catalog; annual loading fees charged by the vendor of the software, or purchase of a load program to be used by library staff; annual software maintenance fees; subscription prices for

the current year of the databases to be loaded; prices of any backfiles to be loaded; and, in most cases, additional terminals, printers, paper, ribbons, or ink cartridges.

Depending on what type of online catalog is in place, there are currently several different choices in terms of what software to purchase. At Notre Dame a NOTIS catalog is in place, so software suitable for an IBM mainframe had to be considered. Three different products were looked at: the NOTIS Multiple Database Access Software, BRS Onsite Software, and Docu/Master from Document Systems. While this does not constitute an endorsement of the NOTIS software, it would be the product of choice at Notre Dame, since it lets the user search indexes the same way the online catalog at the Notre Dame libraries is searched.

Today NOTIS bases the price of the MDAS on the number of vendors an institution will load, rather than the number of databases. For example, the software cost is less if all the databases available from H.W. Wilson, and all the databases from Information Access Corporation are loaded, as opposed to a few Wilson databases, one from IAC, and one from a third vendor such as the American Psychological Association. Approximate costs for NOTIS software are: NOTIS Multiple Database Access Software (2 vendors): \$65,000; tape load software: \$12,000; annual software maintenance fees: \$17,250. There are additional costs for disk packs (as more databases are loaded and the size of the files grows, this can become an annual expense); staff for loading and maintenance; terminals, printers, supplies; current subscriptions; and purchase of backfiles.

In conjunction with the selection of search software, decisions as to what databases to load initially have to be made. Selection of databases is first dependent on compatibility with the software. The pricing of databases for tapeloading can get very tricky, and will also vary greatly between producers of the databases. Some vendors base the price on how many terminals are used, or on how large the user population is. Examples from a few different producers are given below.

H.W. Wilson charges for current subscriptions according to size of user population and the price of the paper index. For example, in the case of Notre Dame, the user population is figured at 12,000 and Wilson charges 25 cents per user. The user charge for each database is \$3,000. Added to this price is the subscription to the paper index. For example, *Reader's Guide* would cost Notre Dame \$3,000 + \$160 = \$3,160; the *Social Sciences Index* would total \$4,119; and the *Business Periodicals Index* \$4,360. These figures are for the current year.

Retrospective coverage is based on the years covered in the backfile and, again, the price of the paper index. For 6.5 years of back coverage of the

Reader's Guide, the price would be 6.5 ↔ \$160 for a total of \$1,040; for the *Social Sciences Index*, 6 years of retrospective coverage would cost \$6,614 and 7 years of *Business Periodicals Index* would cost \$9,520. Those are one-time charges. In addition, there is a \$250 per year, per file, charge for backfiles after the first year, or 5% of the annual licensing fee, whichever is less.

To complicate matters more, other producers have different pricing policies. The American Psychological Association, producers of *Psychological Abstracts* on tape, supplied the following information: annual lease fee for current subscription, \$7,500; annual license fee, \$1,500; backfiles, 10 cents per record (approximately 40,000–50,000 records are added each year). At this time, the cost for the complete archival tapes would be around \$90,000.

SciSearch from the Institute for Scientific Information runs \$30,000 for the current year; backfile prices are available upon request. *Social SciSearch* from the same producer costs \$14,000 for the current year. Information Access files are priced at \$9,000 for the current year and \$2,500 per year for backfiles. A good source for prices of products available on magnetic tape as well as CD-ROM is the latest edition of the *Directory of Portable Databases* published by Cuadra/Elsevier.

CD-ROM networks

There are a number of variations on CD-ROM networks. CD-NET from Meridian Data, Inc., requires that a local area network is already in place. The price of the hardware for up to eight drives ranges from \$7,995 to \$17,060, depending upon the number of drives and the model of the drive tower. Additional costs would be workstations and disk subscriptions.

Multiplatter from Silverplatter Information, Inc., does not require that a LAN be in place, but is in itself a local area network. The basic hardware configuration which allows for up to eight drives costs approximately \$20,000. This does not include the costs of the individual workstations or subscriptions.

Lantastic is a network operating system which will, in effect, network CD-ROM workstations. The software cost is approximately \$600. In addition, there are costs of \$200 per workstation for network cards and for the workstations. Also, staff who can install the software must be available.

Before deciding on a network option, one must make sure the products to be mounted are compatible with the network. For example, Wilson products can be mounted on a *Multiplatter* system, but there is an additional charge for non-Silverplatter products.

Subscription prices for networked databases can get confusing. For some products the price depends on the number of workstations that provide access. Government-produced products such as ERIC, GPO, and MEDLINE do not charge extra for multiple users. Neither does the H.W. Wilson Corporation. *PsychLit*, on the other hand, costs approximately \$2,000 more per year in a multi-user environment, *Sociofile* about \$1,000 more. Each product has to be priced separately; there is no generic formula.

Gateways

CARL Systems offers access to their *UnCover* database, which consists of information about current articles from 10,000 multidisciplinary journals. There are two differently priced Internet gateways. The Standard Internet Gateway requires no password, and the subscribers contend for access channels with other standard gateway users. This option is priced at \$5,000 per year. The Customized Internet Gateway allows the subscriber to tailor *UnCover* to the individual institution in terms of screen design and menus. A library's holdings can be reflected. For two dedicated access channels the annual subscription is \$10,000.

The *Answer Machine* from EasyNet is a different type of gateway. It is a workstation from which online searching through EasyNet is conducted and costs \$2,900. Unlimited usage of 48 databases can be purchased for \$20,000 a year, or the complete set of 450 databases for \$50,000. The drawback to this product is that access is limited to one user at a time unless more workstations and subscriptions are purchased.

Conclusion

No attempt has been made here to be inclusive in the coverage of available products and prices. I have tried instead to give examples of what kinds of pricing structures can be encountered, as well as which components have to be included when costs are being estimated. My final words are all in the form of caveats: negotiations with vendors and producers are important; information given or gathered today will most likely be outdated by tomorrow; and finally, it will probably always be more expensive than anticipated.

Author's note: Contributors to the report on which some of this article is based are: Tom Cashore, Stephen Hayes, Zahri Kamarei, James Ostlund, and Robert Wittorf. ■ ■

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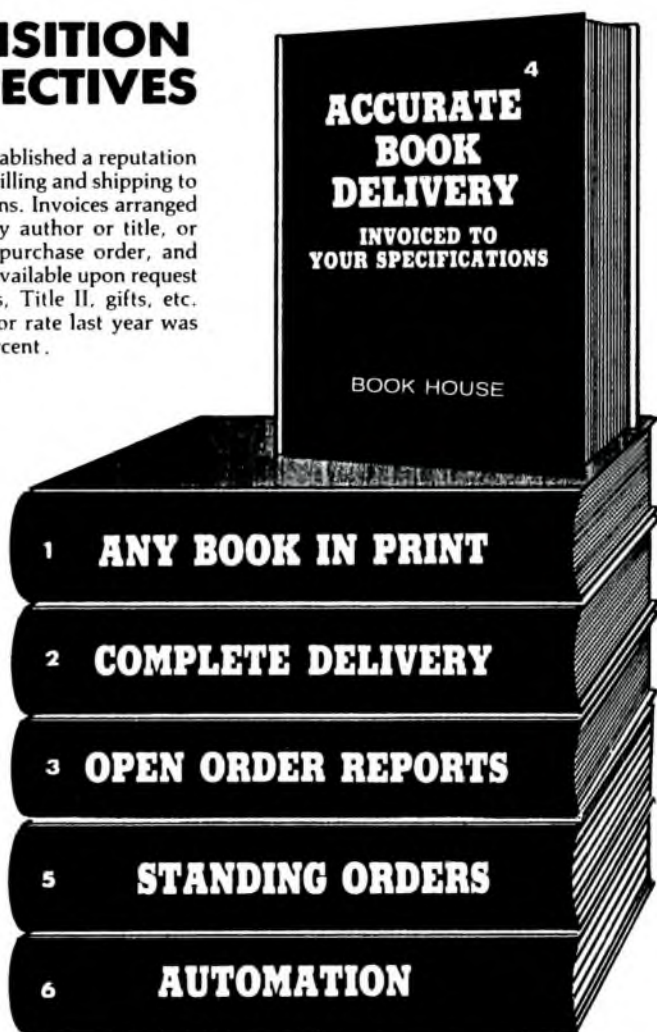
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