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Overview and Evaluation of Selected General Business Databases

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Overview and Evaluation of Selected General Business Databases

Introduction

Aiming at business librarians, this paper outlines and evaluates general business databases commonly used in academic libraries. The evaluation is based on the authors' practical experience. It is by no means an exhaustive study because of the limited availability of databases at the authors' institutions. Furthermore, due to the rapid change in electronic publishing business, some of the facts might have already been out-of-date at the time this paper is published, e.g., user interfaces. Nevertheless, the authors hope that this paper may help librarians make decisions when dealing with business database subscriptions.

Keywords: business database, database evaluation, academic libraries, business libraries

ABI/INFORM Complete (ProQuest)

Overview

As one of the ProQuest's most popular databases, ABI/INFORM appears in many academic, public, government, and corporate libraries worldwide for its comprehensive business information coverage. ABI/INFORM Complete comprises three specialized databases: ABI/INFORM Dateline, ABI/INFORM Global, and ABI/INFORM Trade & Industry. Each focuses on different areas, and they can be searched either together or individually depending on the scope of the search needed. User interfaces and functionalities are mostly consistent across all three databases bearing a few differences. For example, Browse Search is not included in ABI/INFORM Dateline. Information sources are reliable, with some of high reputation, e.g., *The Wall Street Journal*. Publication types include scholarly journals, trade journals, newspapers, magazines, and books. Analytical reports on companies, industries, and markets are provided by Hoovers, Dunn and Bradstreet, and several other reputable sources. Subject areas include accounting, banking, communications, computers, economics, engineering management, finance, health care, human resources, insurance, international trends, law, management/management science, marketing, public administration, real estate, taxation, telecommunications, and transportation. Also available are dissertations and conference proceedings, which can serve as useful sources for fresh ideas, good for researchers and graduate students in the midst of research projects.

Search

Basic Search provides two limiters upfront: full text and peer reviewed. Autocomplete provides wording suggestions while typing. Basic Search performs a keyword search which looks for search terms in all fields. If more than one word is entered the search engine automatically inserts an invisible Boolean operator "and" between each word. Consequently, all terms entered should appear in documents returned from a search. Phrase search, by using quotation marks, can

be used to find words in an exact order. For savvy searchers who want to have more control in searching, Advanced Search offers Boolean Logic, wildcard and truncation, field codes, and various limiters (source type, document type, language, etc.) to get more precise results. A thesaurus is provided for more effective search terms. Both *Export* to a citation software, e.g. RefWorks, and instant online *Cite* are available as options. Articles can be translated into eighteen languages. A searchable Help index is provided for user's convenience.

Worth mentioning

Data & Reports can be used for specific research purposes, such as to find company profiles, company annual reports, case studies, industries, and markets.

Recommendation

ABI/INFORM Complete should meet many research needs of students, faculty and researchers.

Table 1: Overview of ABI/INFORM*

Database Name	Subject Coverage	Number of Publications	Full Text	Date Coverage
ABI/INFORM Dateline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional and local business information 	417	Yes	1985-present
ABI/INFORM Global	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worldwide business • Economics • Finance information 	4,390	Yes	1855-present
ABI/INFORM Trade and Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industries • Companies • Products • Executives • Trends 	4,156	Yes	1971-present

*Data as of October 2016

Business and Company ASAP (Gale)

Overview

A member of Gale's InfoTrac family, Business and Company ASAP provides access to numerous publications on companies, economics, industries, management, markets, and products, as well as U.S. and foreign public and private company directory listings. It offers seven publication types: refereed journals, trade/industry periodicals, local business journals, international economics journals, business directories, PR Newswire releases, and newspapers. All source types are integrated via hyperlinks between them, making it possible for searchers to access targeted information in one search. Updates are daily.

Search

Gale PowerSearch can be used to search either all or selected cross-searchable products. For example, one can go to the Gale Databases list (link available in the left panel menu), select several relevant databases, and search them simultaneously. While it serves its search purpose, the user interface suffers from an aged InfoTrac design which is left-aligned with small font size, making it less attractive, to say the least. Although thoughtfully designed, Help index only offers browse functionality. One of the tenets of database design is that a Help index is more “helpful” if it is searchable. An additional, though not much needed, functionality is its integrated Google Image Search.

Worth mentioning

Citations provide total number of words per article. This is useful for students who look for articles with a certain length, e.g. required by a course professor. Full text directories of private companies and international companies are of particular value.

Recommendation

The out-dated user interface makes it an unattractive product.

Business Economics and Theory (Gale)**Overview**

Another InfoTrac collection, Business Economics and Theory provides over seven million full text articles from academic journals and magazines on topics in business, economics, and finance. Its coverage mimics the titles covered in the American Economic Association's EconLit bibliographic index.

Search

In addition to an improved, new generation of InfoTrac user interface, the database offers modern features that are common in the era of Google: more than thirty languages available for text translation, a built-in dictionary, instant online citation (though limited to MLA and APA styles), and audio downloads (MP3). Search choices include Basic, Subject Guide, Publication, or Advanced Search modes. Search can be limited to peer reviewed, full text, publication title, as well as to documents with images, a better solution than the Google Image Search in Business and Company ASAP.

Worth mentioning

One of the tools, Analyze/Topic Finder, is of particular interest to anyone wanting to explore related issues to a specified topic. Through an algorithm, the tool finds the most relevant items to the top hits from your initial search, and presents them visually in the form of either a wheel or tiles.

Recommendation

A comprehensive collection, this database is suitable for students in business and economics, as well as for faculty and researchers.

Business Insights: Essentials (Gale)

Overview

This database provides reports in two categories: companies and industries. The detailed company reports include profiles, histories, financial reports, investment reports, and SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) reports. The industry reports include essays and market share information. Sources are from scholarly journals, business news, statistical data collection, and numerous business publications by Gale.

Search

To search a company in a simple search, type in either ticker symbol (if it is a publicly traded company), or company name (if it is a private one). To search an industry, type in either NAICS (The North American Industry Classification System) code or industry name. Advanced Search supports Boolean Logic as well as a variety of limiters -- e.g. NAICS and SIC (The Standard Industrial Classification) codes -- to pinpoint the target. Also available are Subject Guide Search and Publication Search which may serve as alternative ways of searching. Most reports are formatted as PDF for standardized presentation.

Worth mentioning

Two sources are of special value: *Company Reports* (investment and financial) by Thomson Reuters and *Global Markets Direct SWOT Reports* by GlobalData Ltd. (U.K.). The interactive comparison charts allow users to compare companies or industries, manipulate statistical data, and provide links to related articles. Gale has made good use of big data and metadata.

Recommendation

Rich data and graphs make this database a good research source for business school students and faculty.

Business Insights: Global (Gale)

Overview

While Business Insights: Essentials focuses on the U.S., Business Insights: Global concentrates on international business. Bearing identical user interface and search platform, Global offers two additional information sources: case studies and comparison charts for countries.

Search

The same as in Essentials.

Worth mentioning

A collection of 2,000 Case Studies provides researchers valuable sources of first-hand information. Studies are drawn from *Journal of Case Studies*, *Business Case Journal*, *TD Magazine*, *Journal of the International Academy for Case Studies*, and other specialized publications. Nearly 200 profiles of UN-recognized countries can be useful for companies looking for business expansion internationally. Comparison charts for countries are provided by

the World Bank and country profiles are from the Economist Intelligence Unit and Dun & Bradstreet.

Recommendation

The case studies collection is an excellent source for Executive Master of Business Administration (EMBA) programs. Profiles and comparison charts of countries provide a convenient way to research global business.

Table 2: Overview of Gale business databases

Database Name	Subject Coverage	Number of Publications	Full Text Count	Date Coverage
Business and Company ASAP*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Companies • Products • Markets • Industries • Economics • Management 	4,402	3,248	1980-present
Business Economics and Theory**	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economics 	1,826	1,166	1980-present
Business Insights: Essentials**	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Companies • Industries • News • Statistical data • In-depth reports 	10,532	8,418	1980-present
Business Insights: Global**	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International business intelligence 	11,216	9,178	1980-present

* Data as of August 2014

** Data as of March 2016

Business Source Complete (EBSCO)

Overview

With more than 5,000 periodical titles indexed and abstracted (3,000 are peer-reviewed), the database provides access to nearly 4,000 journals, magazines, and trade publications in full text (2,000 are peer-reviewed). Literature can go back as far as 1886. Quality publications include *Academy of Management Journal*, *Strategic Management Journal*, *Journal of Marketing Research*, *Harvard Business Review*, and more. Also included are 800 books and monographs, 40,000 author profiles, financial data, government documents, law, 12,000 case studies, 1.2

million company profiles (by MarketLine) and information records, 4,000 SWOT analyses (by Datamonitor), and reports on investment research, market research, industries, and countries.

Search

In comparison to the centered-frame search interface design of Gale, EBSCO search interface features full-screen presentation. Advanced Search provides Boolean Logic operations, various limiters, SmartText Searching (natural language support), seventeen searchable fields, thirty languages for display and twenty-four languages for searching. Search results are grouped by types: academic journals, trade publications, magazines, newspapers, and books.

Worth mentioning

More than 40,000 author profiles reveal authors' education background, specialty, and affiliation. Also of worth is the collection of nearly 10,000 interviews (*Executive & Analyst*) as it provides primary sources about business leaders.

Recommendation

With its vast information sources, Business Source Complete is useful for business school students and faculty, as well as for general public and researchers.

EconLit (EBSCO)

Overview

Published by the American Economic Association (AEA) and regarded as the most authoritative reference source in economics, EconLit provides comprehensive bibliographic coverage of economics-related literature from theory to application, serving as an expanded version of the *Journal of Economic Literature* (JEL)'s indexes of various types of publications. Indexed and classified by subject terms from the JEL Classification System, the database is updated monthly and over 70,000 records are added annually making the total of records 1.2 million. EBSCOhost is one of the three licensed providers of EconLit (the other two are ProQuest and Ovid). In addition, EBSCO offers *EconLit With Full Text* (700 journals as of April 2016), the counterpart to *EconLit Index*.

Search

This version of EconLit offers the same search interface as Business Source Complete since both are based on EBSCO's platform. Twenty-one searchable fields are provided. Advanced Search can be limited to "Linked Full Text" and "Geographic Descriptor" (country). One can also limit the search to one of the six types of records: book, book review, collective volume article, dissertation, journal article, and working paper.

Worth mentioning

Database coverage is comprehensive and international, but most important is its authoritative reputation in the field.

Recommendation

This database is one of the must-have ones in a typical academic library, as well as for government and business libraries.

Table 3: Overview of EBSCO business databases*

Database Name	Subject Coverage	Number of Publications	Full Text Count	Date Coverage
Business Source Complete	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accounting• Finance• Economics• Marketing• Management• Information systems• Production and operations• Companies• Industries• Countries	5,334 Periodicals	3,798	1886-present
EconLit	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Capital markets• Country studies• Economics• Economic forecasting• Environmental economics• Government regulations• Labor economics• Monetary theory• Urban economics	1,300 peer-reviewed journals	700	1886-present

* Data as of April 2016

LexisNexis Academic

Overview

It must be mentioned that unlike the above-mentioned databases, which are typical business databases with scholarly literature, LexisNexis Academic offers little peer-reviewed journal articles. The database is primarily a source of news, laws, and business information. Famous for its authoritative legal-publishing sources, such as Matthew Bender, Martindale-Hubbell, and Shepard's, the company's history can be traced back to 1818 when Henry Butterworth founded Butterworths in London. After many mergers, acquisitions, and name changes, the company eventually became LexisNexis in the 1970s. LexisNexis Academic is part of LexisNexis serving more than 2,000 colleges and universities in the U.S. Over the decades, LexisNexis Academic has changed its user interface and database structure but one thing that has remained constant is its three content segments: news, legal, and business. Users can search full-text documents from more than 17,000 credible information sources.

The news collection offers more than 3,000 newspapers from around the world including *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *The Times*; more than 2,000 magazines, journals and newsletters including *Newsweek*, *Variety*, and *Library Journal*; broadcast transcripts from ABC News, CBS News, NBS News, CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC; and wires services including The Associated Press, Business Wire, and PR Newswire.

The legal collection offers both primary and secondary documents, as well as Shepard's Citations Service. It contains Federal court decisions including U.S. Supreme Court decisions since 1790, Federal laws from 1988, Federal regulations, State court decisions and State codes for all 50 states and territories.

The business collection offers information on more than 80 million U.S. and foreign companies, as well as biographical information on more than 63 million executives. Top credible sources include Standards & Poor's *Corporate Descriptions* and Hoover's *Company Reports*. Also available are the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) filings, such as 10-K and 10-Q reports.

Search

The three content segments, news, legal, and business, can be searched either together or individually. Although not the best user-friendly interface, it supports Boolean Logic as well as natural language search. Advanced Options let the user search by date, source, Index Terms, and Content Type.

Worth mentioning

The database offers not only business information but also legal sources and news publications. It is more than a business database. With Google Translator integrated into its core, LexisNexis Academic can instantly translate retrieved documents into one of the more than 100 languages.

Recommendation

It should be included in core subscription of any academic libraries for its vast information coverage.

Table 5: Overview of LexisNexis Academic

Content Segment	Coverage	Full Text	Bibliographic Tools	Search by
News	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• National• International• Local	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keywords• Source Type• Source Title
Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Federal• State	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Citation• Parties• Topic
Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• United States• Foreign countries	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Company Name• Ticker

Conclusion

We have evaluated ten business databases. Each one has its own strength in content and style of presentation. Some are comprehensive in coverage while others are specialized in certain fields. While all have their usefulness and unique qualities, your library should consider several factors such as budget, relevancy to curriculum, and research level of the library users, before making subscription decisions.

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