

BOOK REVIEW

RECENT BOOKS ON ONLINE DATABASE
SEARCHING; A REVIEW

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Publication on online database searching began to flourish in 1980. This article is intended to review the following five books published recently.

Chen, Ching-chih and Suzanna Schweizer. *Online Bibliographic Searching; A Learning Manual*. New York: Neal-Schuman, 1981. 227p.

Fenichel, Carol H. and Thomas H. Hogan. *Online Searching; A Primer*. Marlton, N.J.: Learning Information, 1981. 152p.

Henry, W. M. and others. *Online Searching: An Introduction*. Boston: Butterworths, 1980. 209p.

Hoover, Ryan E., ed. *The Library and Information Manager's Guide to Online Services*. White Plains, N.Y.: Knowledge Industry, 1980. 270p.

Meadow, Charles T. and Pauline A. Cochrane. *Basics of Online Searching*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1981. 245p.

The book edited by Hoover is a collection of articles covering various aspects of online services. It consists of ten chapters which can be grouped into four parts: (1) an overview of online information retrieval and future prospects; (2) directory information, including chapters on types of data bases and on producers and vendors of bibliographic online services; (3) management of online services, such as online user groups; (4) the mechanics of online searching, being a brief introduction to the technical aspects of searching. Bibliographical references follow each chapter. The

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book ends with a selected bibliography and a glossary of online terms.

Its detailed discussion on types of databases and online database producers and vendors is very informative. The book also features searching techniques with examples of simple searching modes in three systems, DIALOG, ORBIT, and BRS. But no explanation of the function of commands is given. It would have been more useful, if the use of controlled vocabulary and the free text searching, its different results, and the search and default search modes in BRS be briefly introduced. It must be noted, however, that the book is not intended to deal with searching techniques in detail.

Fenichel and Hogan's book has twelve chapters in four parts. Part one in four chapters provides an overall view of the online industry and three types of organizations, namely online vendors, database producers, and users. Chapter five on the mechanics of searching constitutes part two. The third part consists of five chapters on equipments, the reference process, costs and charging policies, management aspects, and training. The last part in two chapters is devoted to non-bibliographic databases and prospects for the future. It has a glossary and a bibliography. The appendixes include (1) Selected large databases, (2) Selected vendors, (3) Professional associations, (4) Selected consultants (c), brokers (b), networks (n), and (5) Selected terminal manufacturers.

As compared with Hoover, Fenichel features separate chapters on terminal equipment and non-bibliographic databases and is strong in directory information in its appendixes. In general, it covers the same major topics as Hoover but is much more concise perhaps due to its size. In some aspects, clarity is sacrificed by brevity. The searching examples in DIALOG are too brief to be comprehended by a beginner. Another flaw is that works cited in the text are often not listed in the references. This inconsistency seriously limits the book's usefulness. Its definition of database is also inconsistent. In the glossary, a

database is defined as “a collection of data in machine-readable term” (p. 116). It is, however, considered in the text as “the computer-readable equivalent of a printed index or abstract publication” (p. 7).

Meadow and Cochrane and Henry and others are two books which stress concept, principles, and techniques of online searching. Meadow is intended “to teach the principles of interactive bibliographic searching, or information retrieval, to those with little or no prior experience” (Preface). It consists of twelve chapters with bulk of appendixes. The first four chapters present the concept of searching, elements of interactive searching, the presearch interview, and the terminals and networks. The remaining chapters deal with search mechanics and search strategy of three major systems, DIALOG, ORBIT, and BRS. Aspects of searching procedures, such as logon, search, result, and logoff are well presented with illustrations. Of particular usefulness to searching are three chapters: chapter 7 on basic commands with clear explanation on the use of Boolean logic, chapter 8 on text searching, fraction of word searching, and the use of logical operators, such as (W) in DIALOG and *adj* in BRS, and chapter 9 on beginning and ending a search. A beginner will find the tips of using terminals and explanation of key functions of terminal switches extremely useful. Since the book stresses searching basics, little efforts has been made to management aspects of the online service.

Meadow does not discuss in detail all commands and contingencies; it is not a substitute for search manuals. As indicated in its preface, the purpose of the book is “to teach principles, not the detailed mechanics of any particular search system.” Within this context, the book is well presented. On the other hand, because of this limitation, there are drawbacks. It does not explain step by step search. As such, it is hard for a beginner to comprehend fully many search examples given in the book. A beginner is often puzzled by the difference between single word and multiple words searching, the result of using multiple words

which are not descriptors, search of multiple words resulting in no postings in DIALOG and ORBIT, yet generating numerous postings in BRS. The book would have served its purpose better, if these are explained.

There are some editorial inadvertances. The use of the SELECT command in DIALOG to select a term of ten requires separation between the command, SELECT, and the term to be SELECTed. The example “? SELECTHEAT PUMP?” (p. 88) for searching the term, heat pump, without separating the command and the term is incorrect. In the example of DIALOG searching of “heat pumps”, the use of the EXPAND command and again the SELECT command to search the same bound term (pp. 87-88) is redundant.

Its appendixes constitute forty percent of the content. Two of the three appendixes are simple reproduction of DIALOG's publications. It may well be questioned as to the usefulness of including vendor's publications, such as “Pocket Guide to DIALOG Commands” which is available free to users.

As compared with Meadow, Henry has a similar purpose. It differs from the former, however, in that it also discusses management aspects of online services and training of online searching. One of its features is to cover European database vendors, such as Blaise and Euronet.

Henry has ten chapters which can be roughly grouped into three parts. The first part in three chapters gives a general review of online searching and a brief introduction to the equipments. The second part in four chapters deal with data structure and search facilities and techniques. The third part which consists of three chapters is an introduction to the role of the intermediary, data management, and education and training.

Of particular value to learning online search is the second part. Chapter 4 on how to search, chapter 5 on the structure of information within a database, chapter 6 on the search facilities available, and chapter 7 on search preparation and strategy are all well presented. Its discussion on beginning of a search with step

by step illustrations and various search approaches, including single term, term truncation, field searching and phrase searching are very useful to the beginner.

Examples are drawn from different vendors, as its preface indicates: "Although some specific examples from real systems have been given in this book, it is not directed towards any particular system." It may, however, confuse the beginner by using different systems without giving any clue as to which system is used. Beginners will have hard time understanding various commands of comparable function used by different systems, unless they are clearly explained.

Like Meadow, Henry has a substantial portion of appendixes. They consist of a check list for search preparation and search strategy — a useful guide to beginners, and six vendors. The vendors are Blaise, ESA-IRS, Infoline, Lockheed [DIALOG], SDC [ORBIT], and Euronet. For each vendor, except Euronet, is provided with searchable fields, databases, and a summary of commands. For Euronet, it reproduced the brochure of the Euronet Launch Team of the Commission of the European Communities.

Chen is primarily a manual for searching, as its preface states: "This book is a beginner's guide to the skills necessary for the retrieval of information from computerized bibliographic files, with special emphasis on techniques of online information searching." It consists of seven chapters, dealing with concepts, searching techniques, vendors and management. Each chapter is given a list of references for further reading.

All three major vendors, i.e., DIALOG, ORBIT, and BRS, are introduced, but so far as the searching technique is concerned, it is basically, though not exclusively, DIALOG. The DIALOG searching technique is presented in some detail in chapters 2, 4, and 5 with an appendix, "Answers to Online Exercises of DIALOG Lab Workbook." Some aspects are particularly well treated, such as the difference between the use of controlled vocabularies and searching of terms limited by /DE and /DF in

DIALOG. On the other hand, other aspects which should be included in a manual are not mentioned, as for instance, the stacking commands, the TYPE command in consecutive, non-consecutive order or both, and LOGOFF HOLD.

The use of examples of simple search, followed by explanation of functions of different commands in DIALOG, such as BEGIN, SELECT, COMBINE, and TYPE is a good approach. The book also gives a concise comparison of features of three systems. This proves to be a difficult job, since each system has its own features which can hardly be explained with clarity in a few words. More elaboration is necessary. For instance, the use of Basic Index and Additional Index in DIALOG can be comprehended easily since their codes are attached with "/" and "=" signs respectively. But in the case of ORBIT, limitations of field search in both Basic Index and Additional Index are all attached by a slash "/". A beginner will be at a loss at the simple mentioning of Basic Index and Additional Index without further elaboration of their differences in use (pp. 134-5).

In DIALOG, with negligible exception, journals are represented by the code JO= or JN=. The use of CO= designating journals (p. 135) should be mentioned as an exception. Mistakes in using BRS are found on page 138:

- (1) The use of qualifiers in BRS requires dots on both sides of the qualifier code, such as .TI. and .AB., but not .TI or .AB
- (2) A slash "/" preceding a qualifier code is not used in BRS.
- (3) The logical operator *with* is for words to be searched in the same sentence, not in the same field.

The five books just mentioned represent three different approaches. The first two (Hoover and Fenichel) deal with management of online searching. Concept, principles and searching techniques are presented in the next two books (Meadow and Henry). The last one (Chen) is a searching manual. Readers must be aware of how fast the field is subject to change, revision, and refinement. A book on online searching becomes

dated quickly. For instance, new features of ORBIT, such as the SELECT command after the term(s) NEIGHBORed and the AUDIT command which is equivalent to DIALOG's SuperSelect and SET DETAIL=ON in BRS, are not included in Meadow (pp. 80 and 74). One terminal manufacturer listed in Fenichel (p. 130) is now defunct. "Hours of Operation" in Chen (p. 121) has long been dated.

The online database bibliographical search service was made available to the public around 1970 and since 1975 has developed rapidly. The online service as a library course was introduced in the late 1970s and becomes now an integral part of library school curriculum. Any one who is working in the field of library and information science must have some familiarity with online searching. The five books are timely additions to the literature of online database searching.