

Why Online Databases?

The AISWA Libraries Online Database Consortium, established in 2003, was originally created to help lower the cost of online databases to WA Independent Schools by forming a group that would have greater bargaining powers with various suppliers. Since then, the Consortium has grown to include a number of products and members now include other sectors of the education community.

Each term, the Consortium Committee holds a professional development session, focusing on either existing products that are part of the consortium and / or new or possible products to be added. Last term, the Committee was able to organise two guest speakers, Ian McLeod from EBSCO Publishing and Chris Edmeades, Area Sales Manager for Proquest, to address interested people on the topic of why you might decide to subscribe to an online database.

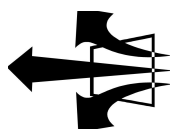
An online database can be defined as an electronic file 'of either full-text documents or citations and abstracts which can be searched' (Library vocabulary, 2002). These are usually accessed via the internet for an annual subscription fee. (Nicolet College Library glossary, 2002). Not all of the information in the world is freely available; with the majority of it being housed in online databases and other similar constructs that search engines cannot search and / or the user cannot access for free.

The following piece is a summary of the points raised by the presenters with expanded explanations of each.

Why then online databases?

Ian McLeod presented the following reasons as to why you might consider subscribing to an online database.

1. To extend the library collection beyond its walls.



The University of California, Berkeley conducted two studies, one in 2000 and one in 2003, to investigate the amount of information produced each year. In the first study, they discovered that the total of all new information generated doubled every year. (Stewart, 2001, p. 42) The second study, conducted along similar lines found that the figure was closer to 30% each year for the time between the two studies, 1999 and 2002. (Lyman, 2003)

It would be almost impossible, and certainly beyond the scope of their responsibilities, for most libraries, especially school libraries, to collect and store the sum total of all information as it became available each year. Not all of the information generated each year would be considered accurate or reliable nor relevant to everyone; not to mention the space problem that would arise quite quickly with these kinds of figures.

Online databases are able to gather credible information sources and make them available through the one access point thereby adding to your collection virtually rather than physically. This leads onto the next point.

2. To allow your collection to be available 24/7



No library, that I am aware of, is open 24 hours, 7 days a week yet many students do work through the night and into the early hours of the morning finishing assignments. Not all of them can simply be finishing their final draft, can they; of course not. Students, of all ages, have left assignments until the last minute and they will continue to do so but in these days of technology and the internet, where do they look for information? Google, and the other multitude of search engines available to search the free Internet, of course!



The Internet is a great invention but the quality of the information can vary and inexperienced researchers can find themselves using very inaccurate and unreliable material, particularly if they have not been taught how to evaluate websites. Online databases can provide remote access to high quality resources quickly and when your students need them – yes even at 3am when your doors are closed.

To see just how an online database, like eLibrary, compares to search engines like Google, have a look at the table on the next page which has been provided by Proquest.

3. To access titles you may not be able to afford alone

Budgets are always tight and the cost



eLibrary Curriculum Edition vs. Google and Other Web Surfing

eLibrary Curriculum Edition (CE) for Teacher and Student Curriculum-Relevant Information	Googling for Curriculum-Relevant Information
Why do so many teachers and students think that Google and other Internet surfing are superior to their own library print and digital learning resources that they can access from home?	Do doctors, lawyers, engineers, and other professionals Google for information to solve problems for clients? Don't these professionals subscribe to custom professional databases to keep them current and help them solve client problems?
100% of eLibrary CE is K-12 curriculum-relevant for teachers and for students.	Less than 10% of Google is K-12 curriculum-relevant and is focused mostly on consumer-related information.
Only publisher quality information and the best <i>Editor's Choice</i> websites.	High percentage of information without deep archives, not updated regularly, and may be created by questionable sources.
Thousands of newspapers, magazines, and other media types, including websites, which students can surf simultaneously or by media type.	Searches do not include access to newspapers and curriculum-relevant magazines and journals because this information is copyrighted and only available through a subscription database.
<i>BookCarts</i> allow teachers/librarians to customize learning resources for easy access and focused research for their students. Also see Engaging Issues and Standards-Based Learning Activities .	No equivalent feature for students to use.
Lexile reading level searches adjust information to the student's ability to understand it—No Child Left Behind.	No method for adjusting results to student reading levels.
<i>Reference</i> provides integrated support for reading with understanding and enrichment sidebars—No Child Left Behind.	No equivalent feature for students to use.
Publication browsing of content area and professional journals benefits teachers who need to stay current in their subject and profession.	No publications or publication browsing feature.
<i>My List</i> provides student with a list of selected resources and citations for use in writing reports.	No equivalent feature for students to use.
Curriculum-integrated lesson plans in <i>Editor's Choice</i> websites. Study units correlated to curriculum topics in <i>History Study Center</i> and in <i>ProQuest Learning: Literature</i> . Also see Engaging Issues and Standards-Based Learning Activities .	Google has none of these features. Google can lead you to lesson plan websites where busy teachers will have to do the necessary selection and correlation to curriculum topics.
Publisher quality content and quality websites address parent and administrative concerns about the risks of student Internet surfing.	Minimal or user-activated filters and no direct controls over authority and decency of websites.
eLibrary CE content and curriculum learning resources are correlated to state/national standards.	Content not correlated to state standards and national standards and there are no correlated learning resources.
Easy and quick access to curriculum-relevant documents and websites— <i>Best Part</i> saves time in browsing for relevancy, leaving more time for higher-order thinking and writing.	Higher-order learning time wasted in determining curriculum-relevancy and accuracy of website information.

of resources always seems to be on the increase. Decisions are continually being made to determine what will give the best value for money while still providing a reasonable breadth and depth of information within the collection. Periodicals, for example can be quite costly, and may mean that a library can only afford to subscribe to one or two for each learning area. Online databases gather together a large number of resources that even the most generous of budgets would find hard to cover. They also include those hard to obtain resources like newspaper articles from countries around the world. Although some may be more expensive than print resources the value of their contents far out-weighs the price of a subscription.



4. To give students a 'head start' for tertiary studies

When students reach tertiary education, they are expected to move towards the use of periodicals more for their research as the information tends to be more up-to-date than books. The curriculum for many of the upper school subjects that students currently study in Western Australia also encourages wider reading from a range of sources and the courses of study that are to be introduced in 2007 seem to be emphasising that aspect even more.



Tertiary institutions are also moving more towards online databases for provision of information and resources. All of the universities in Western Australia, including Notre Dame, and the TAFE Colleges now offer a range of online databases via

their websites, with many of them being Proquest and EBSCO products. Ian pointed out that online databases are becoming more popular and common as part of a university's acquisitions and it will be inevitable that more information will be provided online and in online databases. From personal observations, this is certainly the case. Just in the last year, there has been a significant increase in subject specific databases which did not exist two years ago.

If this is the future of information and education, then surely we need to provide students with the knowledge that online databases exist as a source of information and the experience of accessing them; not just the free Internet. By not providing opportunities for students we are in fact disadvantaging them before they have even begun their tertiary studies. In medicine, would something like this be considered malpractice?

5. The content is easily searched

While all of us try to make our physical collections more accessible by adding contents pages, chapter headings and various other notes to the resources' records on our Information Management Systems, there is no substitute for being able to search every word on every page. While this is not possible with our print collections, online databases make this a reality. They allow more thorough searching because of the availability of either full text or detailed abstracts and summaries of articles. This can be very powerful and may allow you to locate that 'needle in the haystack' that would have once remained elusive. This can also be true of the free Internet but the user cannot control the quality of the results as with an online database.



6. Provision of alerts and other functionality

Many of the online databases available have extra features that can be used to enhance the content and use. For example most have the ability to generate various statistics including usage at school and in the home. Ian said that these statistics could now be used, like circulation figures previously were, for justification of spending and funding proposals. It is also possible for some databases to provide newsletters and other alerts via e-mail to keep the user informed of changes, updates and additions to the product.

Chris Edmeades, a Teacher Librarian in a former life, took a slightly different and more humorous approach and added a few extra reasons.

7. To accommodate the youth culture



Although we try to educate students about sources of information, selecting the best tool for the job and the quality, reliability and accuracy of the various types, it is important to take into account the reality that we are faced with. That is, students today have the belief that it is more credible if it is found online. This is unfortunate but true none-the-less. The challenge then, is to provide them with quality online sources of information, which is where online databases are perfect.

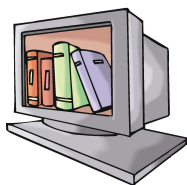
The other aspect that should be considered is the need to cater for different learning styles and preferences that our students may have. Online databases seem to be recognising

Teacher Librarians as outlined by ASLA

this need and are continually adding more multimedia content to their collections. For students who have specific needs in this area, an online database could be the way to address this issue.

8. To save time and money

All print resources require some level of processing; how much will obviously depend on the policies and procedures set by the individual library. Regardless of the level of processing undertaken, all will involve staff time and resources, which all cost money. Then there is the maintenance of the physical collection including the shelving, stock-taking and finally the weeding, if this is appropriate. Online databases take away the need for these processes and will ultimately free up time and some money to direct in other areas.



The other thing to consider is subscribing to the print version verses the online database version.

Many resources, particularly periodicals, are now available full text in one database or another. If it is the information that is important and not the format then the online version may be just as good and the money from the print edition can be directed toward the cost of the database or some other resource. If format is important, bear in mind that some databases also provide PDF versions of the pages which would allow the user to view the page as it was originally published. Remember that being available online would also allow more than one person to access the resource.

9. To meet the standards of professional excellence for



Recently, ASLA released *Standards of professional excellence for teacher librarians*. This document examines the role of the Teacher Librarian

within three main areas; one of these being professional knowledge. Within this section, one point states that 'excellent teacher librarians comprehensively understand the role of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in lifelong learning' (Standards of professional excellence for teacher librarians, 2005).

The number of online databases will only continue to grow so it is important that students are aware of their existence and how they work. It is the responsibility of the Teacher Librarian to equip students with the skills they will require in the future to navigate this ever-expanding information sources.

Besides examining the reasons behind the decision to include an online database as part of a collection, Chris and Ian featured some their respective company's products.

Proquest



Proquest, a company based in the United States, has a range of products suitable for K-12 schools in Australia. Although many of these have an American slant to them, part of Chris' job is to increase the Australian content within the various products. One of the most popular Proquest products in Australia is eLibrary Australasia, formally known as Electric Library Australasia. It:

- Has 100% full text,
- Contains 3 types of resources – books (a small number), articles (from both newspapers and magazines and recommended websites,
- Has a bookcart feature to create pages similar to hotlists and pathfinders,
- An administrative section for configuring various parts of the database; and
- Training and user manuals available.

Proquest also has other products on offer that would be appropriate to schools in Australia:

- eLibrary Science
- SIRS (Social Issues Research Service)
- Culture Grams (Country Information)
- Proquest Learning: Literature
- Proquest Learning: History

For more information why not visit their website which features all of these products and more. <http://www.proquestk12.com/>. This website also features copyright free promotional and support material for all their products in either PDF or PPT format.

EBSCO



EBSCO has a large range of broad and subject specific databases suitable for schools. The main ones of interest to Australian schools are:

Student research databases

- Australia / New Zealand Reference Centre (ANZRC)
- Scientific American Archive Online
- History Reference Center

- Marshall Cavendish Science Reference Center

Literary databases

- MagillOnLiterature Plus
- NoveList

Teacher databases

- Education and Resources in Education Index (ERIC)
- Professional Development Collection

Major features of many EBSCO products:

- All databases use the same interface, so users only need to familiarise themselves with the searching techniques of one database and they will be able to navigate the rest in the same way,
- Monographs are included as resources alongside periodical and newspaper articles,
- Has persistent links which will allow:

Teachers to link directly to articles recommended for further reading – this would be of particular benefit to upper school students; and

Libraries to link through from their OPACs to specific records in the databases which will increase usage; and

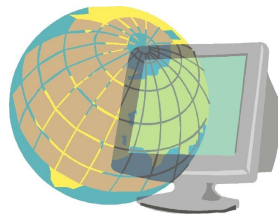
- The ability to exclude titles from displaying if they are not appropriate for your clientele.

Ian also added that with EBSCO, once you have subscribed to one database, any further subscriptions will be offered at a cheaper price.

Overall the morning was well attended and very informative, even for those of us who use the products already. Some final words of advice from the presenters:

- Ask for a free trial of the products,
- Make use of the training that companies offer; and
- Join the consortium to ensure you get the best price possible.

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For details of products covered by the Consortium or if you are considering joining the consortium, please contact Robin Wake at Hale School.

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