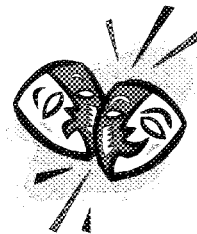


péter's picks & pans



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Hoover's Online

The Grove Dictionary of Art

Bowker's Complete Video Directory on Disc

One of this month's Picks is a free business directory, Hoover's Online, which just went through a significant facelift and content enhancements, and is better than ever. The other is subscription-based The Grove Dictionary of Art whose rich textual content was recently matched by direct and linked access to high-quality reproductions of tens of thousands of masterpieces of art. The Pan is the \$540 Bowker Complete Video Directory that is not complete in any way, and lags hopelessly behind its much more rich, current, and informative competitors on the Web that also provide incomparably more sophisticated, yet intuitive search options—and they are free.



the picks

HOOVER'S ONLINE (<http://www.hoovers.com>)

Hoover's company directory has been around in print since 1991, and later in CD-ROM and online format. (Editor's note: For an in-depth review of Hoover's Online, see Jan Davis Tudor's BUSINESS CONNECTIONS column in the December 1999 issue.) Its Web version has become my favorite for looking up vital statistics about

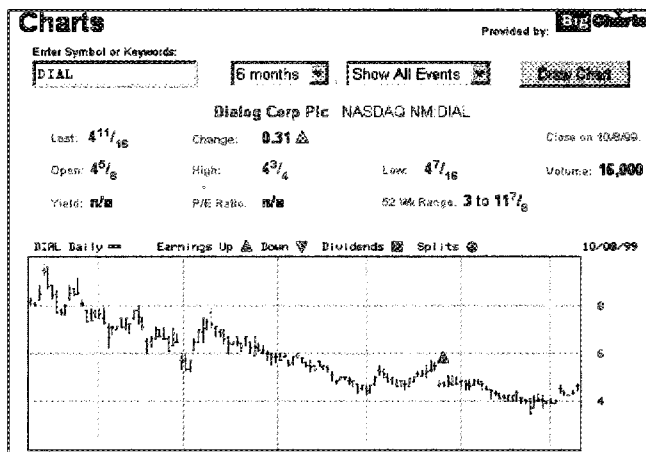
companies and their officers. In mid-September, Hoover's was relaunched with an even niftier interface and enhanced content. For a great many potential users, it will become not only the perfect company directory, but also a business Web portal. The company capsules and financials provide the information of the corporate world that perfectly match the need of the tens of thousands of undergraduates in business schools, and the tens of thousands in business suits.

The information is presented in a highly legible and attractive format, something that cannot be said of the traditional online company directories. Beyond the company capsules that go back 15 months and annual and quarterly financials that go back three years, there are many other useful pieces of information even in the

free version. The stock charts from BigCharts give the users utmost flexibility in deciding for the period to be charted, and of the inclusion of certain events (splits, dividends, earnings). The time span of the charts can be defined as ranging from one day to a decade. As if this were not enough of dynamic, on-the-fly chart generation, Hoover's takes you to the BigCharts site and discreetly waits for you like a good butler-chauffeur to take you back to its own site.

The News & Analysis section provides a list of recent events about the chosen company with hotlinks to the original source, such as M2 PressWire or PR News. The day Dialog announced its Science, Technology, and Business Portals developed with Netscape, it was listed among the news items related to Dialog. There are duplicate

Hoover's partner, BigCharts, offers visually informative charts for public-traded companies, such as The Dialog Corporation.



press releases—these should be eliminated.

The Career Development section is again a link to a nice collection of information from no less an authority than Dow Jones—offering a searchable job database, salaries by industries, job openings alert service, relocation information from respectable sources, advice for writing, a sample of application letters, and—a very useful gadget—a salary calculator for those who are job-hunting. The headline story about the importance of librarianship as a profession was quite uplifting for an educator, and thankfully supported by the salary data from the 1999 SLA survey.

The Travel section offers hotel, car, and flight reservation and destination guides. These are readily available from many other sites, though the hotel subsection surprised me with a \$99 price for Baily's in Las Vegas during COMDEX when even Motel 6 charges \$106 for a room. The List of Lists section is not as apparent as it used to be before the redesign of the site, but remains very informative, nevertheless. It has a first class compilation of top (and, in some categories, bottom) companies, brands, products, entrepreneurs, and locations. The beauty of this section, in particular, and the entire Web site, in general, is how effectively Hoover's selects and filters the Web resources to cater to the business travelers' and the interested armchair travelers' needs. Even if you don't invest in stocks, don't hunt for jobs, and don't travel, a visit to Hoover's is worthwhile to see a perfect specialty portal.



THE GROVE DICTIONARY OF ART ONLINE
(<http://www.groveart.com>)

I could never fathom why this immensely comprehensive source is called a dictionary when it is much more like an encyclopedia, and a very impressive one at that. The print edition of The Grove Dictionary of Art (TGDA) has 34 volumes for the 21,000 articles and is comprised of 26 million words. This yields an average of 1,240 words per article. By comparison,

A deep link from the online TGDA to the specific work of art at the free Web site of the National Gallery appears in a separate window. ▼

▲ Grove's *The Dictionary of Art* offers sophisticated yet intuitive browse and search options.

Encyclopedia Britannica has 44 million words to cover the entire human knowledge. The online version of TGDA adds awesome search and link capabilities to this goldmine of art information.

No wonder that in TGDA even the smallest countries and the ultra vogue artistic schools get substantial treatment. The online version—through a very nicely designed interface—features the powerful search engine Excalibur to find anything that has to do with art. You may browse the articles or search the index entries, the body of the entire text, or the captions. Beyond the run-of-the-mill Boolean search options, there are additional features, such as concept searching and pattern searching. The former one makes it possible to find related terms and synonyms. For example, when typing in the word “lake” the search engine will also look for “loch.” The latter—better known as fuzzy searching—will take care of spelling variations that are much needed for Dutch, romanized Slavic, Asian, Greek, and Latin names, among others.

The illustrations commissioned for the printed TGDA are included, but the ones licensed from third parties are not. However, Macmillan Publishers partnered with the Bridgeman Art Library and has already 30,000 image links to that collection. By February 2000, there will be more than 100,000 images from that collection. The number of links to the free Web sites of art

is also likely to grow from the current 15,000 despite of the controversy.

Many museums resent the idea that the subscription-based TGDA directly links to them without their permission. In a legal sense, Macmillan seems to be in safe water, but it would be worth not antagonizing the museums. If they make some location changes it will doubtless irritate the paying customers of TGDA who will be led to dead links. I think there is an amicable solution. The title of the work in the caption currently is deep-linked to the specific work of art only. The name of the museum also appears in the caption, but it is not hotlinked. It could easily be hotlinked to take the user to the main door of the real or virtual museum and this way TGDA would reciprocate the favor.

There are various pricing alternatives. The one for ten concurrent users is \$2,000 a year if the institute has the print version, and \$5,500 together with the print volume. This is a very good deal considering that the list price of the print edition is \$8,800. Individuals have free access for a 24-hour period, and can buy a carnet for ten 24-hour periods for a mere \$13.50. I find it nice that a British company uses a French term, carnet, without fear of being charged with high treason. The Louvre probably would not get away with it. In addition, this ticket is much less expensive than the carnet for the Paris metro, and you will have a wonderful ride.



the pan

BOWKER'S COMPLETE VIDEO DIRECTORY ON DISC

There are many problems with Bowker's Complete Video Directory on Disc (BCVD). The publicity blurb promises that it is "the ultimate tool for videocassette research." It also claims that it "gives you unmatched electronic access to the entire videocassette marketplace." It does not.

Even if you can generously accept that BCVD has information on about 200,000 movies—including entertainment flicks (65,080), feature films (33,063), children's videos (39,800), educational videos (39,092), and a few thousand other vocational videos in business, law, art, religion, and medicine—this database is smaller than the Internet Movie Database (IMDb; <http://us.imdb.com>) with its 213,492 movie records, and seemingly somewhat larger than the All-Movie Guide (AMG; <http://allmovie.com>) which has 155,151 records. In reality, there is information on only about 140,000 videos in BCVD and often very incomplete information.

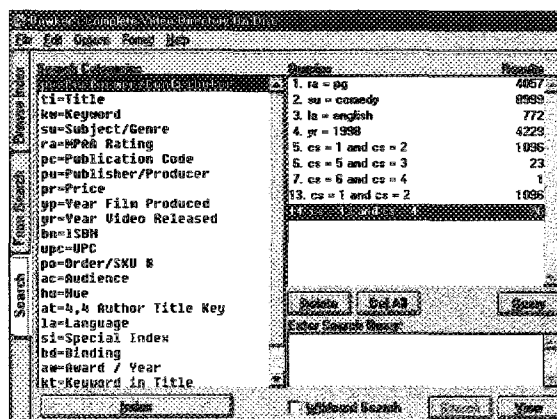
Any search would prove that for the very same movie there are several records. These may differ in some technical/commercial aspects, such as the Universal Product Code, but they certainly do not represent unique works, as is the case with the two other databases. There are, for example, 11 records with the title: Holocaust. Seven of them are for the very same movie, the multiple award-winning documentary. Both IMDb and AMG have one awesomely complete record for this video, listing all the awards that the series won and far more cast members and other relevant information. A search for Meryl Streep retrieves 89 records in BCVD, but the set represents merely 29 movies. Most of them appear repeatedly, in different guises and with incorrect spellings (*The Bridge of Madison County*, *The Bridges of Madison County*, *Bridges of Madison County*). The results are displayed in decreasing order of release year. The latter two records do not have this data

The search strategy suggested by Bowker's Complete Video Directory yields a single hit (set 7), and even removing the language limit would increase it to only 26 records (set 14) due to massive omissions.

element and, therefore, appear at the tail end of the list, so the duplicates and triplicates are not obvious. As the release year is available for only 47,864 records, this is not a really good sort parameter. Even if the year of production were used as an alternate sort criterion, nearly half of the records would be without this sort key.

Other data elements are also missing far too often. Nearly half of the records, for example, have no information about whether the movie is black and white, color, or colorized. Language information is unavailable for 94% of the records. Both these options are still offered as a search criterion without adequate warning. The help file claims that "searching on the language code allows you to retrieve citations for all non-English language books. ENG (English) is used as a term for multilingual books." Even if you replace the term books with videos, this rule does not always apply, and experience teaches us that users rarely read the help file anyway. They would not be much encouraged, when using the video directory help file, to find it labeled "Books in Print." In reality, it turns out to be a hastily and carelessly adapted version of the help file for Books in Print. The author of the publicity blurb may have also felt a lack of motivation to learn this rule about how to use English in the language field. The blurb encourages the user to "compile lists of videos that meet specific parameters, like all PG-rated comedies in English that were released in 1998." If the copywriter had done so, he would have retrieved nothing but a single record: *Leave It to Beaver*. Even after omitting the language limit, there are merely 26 records—the aggregate effect of using multiple search criteria that are absent from many records.

One cannot find DVD releases of movies because the database designers



attach the word DVD after the price, rendering this increasingly important information not searchable. There are three records found when using DVD as a keyword because DVD appears in the short annotations. There is a field where the video format (VHS, Beta, Laserdisk) is usually identified, the rather ill-named Binding field. No matter how poorly chosen the name (probably another heritage from Books in Print), it is the one where the DVD format should have been entered. Then again, it may have revealed how few of the 4,000+ DVD-titles on the market are in this database.

The record content in BCVD is simply incomparable with the rich, informative, and hyperlinked content of the competitors that are also much more current.

There are some genres where BCVD may be better than its competitors, such as Medical Video, Religious Video, or Christian Video (that must be searched as Christian Book, by the way). To tell the truth, I could not find some of the BCVD's inspirational titles in either AMG or IMDb, such as Always Tell the Truth, Moment of Truth, and Truth & Trust. However, for any other genre in any format, the IMDb and AMG databases are far superior in content and software alike and are more appropriate for any public, special, school, or academic library. They are also free, while BCVD costs \$520. Use the saving to buy some additional videos for your library.

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