

péter's picks & pans



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I dedicate this month's column to databases that offer information about serial publications. I spent a couple of years of my career dealing with serials automation, including the creation of union catalogs of serials, the design of the PC-based local database system for creating records by national libraries for submission to the International Serials Data System (ISDS), and have used and reviewed most of the major serials directories and serials subsets of CD-ROM catalogs. I know that it is hopeless to create, let alone maintain, a perfect serials database—serials are in constant flux, changing their title, editor, frequency, publisher, subscription price, place of publication, and everything else that can change. From that perspective I chose the promising SFUjake directory and the JournalSeek database as my picks, and the increasingly outdated, neglected, dusty, and rusty PubList directory (which I used to like and recommend in its salad days) as my pan.



the picks

SFUjake

JournalSeek

PubList

SFUJAKE

The SFUjake directory from Simon Fraser University [<http://jake.lib.sfu.ca>] is an impressive derivative of the innovative jake database originally developed by librarians at the Cushing/Whitney Medical Library at Yale University as open source software. It is a useful free tool for finding the indexing/abstracting (A/I) and full-text coverage of 25,000+ journals. The underlying database was built by the original developers from title lists collected from publishers, A/I services, and aggregators. SFU developed a new interface and enhanced the original data.

True, 25,000 journals represent only a small fraction of serials publications. Ulrich's and EBSCO provide information on about 10 times as many serials. Even these collections are dwarfed by the nearly 1 million serials records in the LC catalog, and the over 1 million records in the ISDS Registry. Then again, these 25,000 journals represent the most widely read scientific, technical, medical, and general-interest journals and newspapers from the most respected publishers. You will not find coverage about the *Duluth Daily* or the *Hungarian Herald*, but I presume that these are not covered by any A/I services or aggregators, along with the majority of serials listed in the commercial serials directories.

Although it is clearly a work in progress, missing coverage information for some large aggregators such as Dialog and important databases like LISA, it does have title coverage information from the largest and most important publishers—Elsevier (and all of its imprints), Kluwer, ACM, IEEE, ACS, Blackwell, Lippincott, Nature Publishing Group, NRC, Oxford University Press, Taylor & Francis, Wiley, MCB University Press, and from the most important A/I services, aggregators, and digital archive facilitators—Gale Group, ProQuest, H.W. Wilson, Ovid, OCLC, EBSCO, Ingenta/Catchword, and HighWire Press.

Computer and Information Science - Information Storage: 37 journals

Biomedical Engineering
Biosensors and Bioelectronics
Journal of Information Storage and Processing Systems
Journal of Magnetism and Magnetic Materials
Reactive and Functional Polymers
Solid State Sciences
World Wide Web
Annals of Economic and Social Measurement
Annual Review of Information Science & Technology
Data Processing
Database
Database Searcher
Digital News & Review
Document Delivery World
Inform
Information and Records Management Now: Information Management
Information Management
Information Manager
Information Reports
Information Reports and Bibliographies
Information Retrieval and Library Automation
Information Services and Use
Information Storage & Retrieval
Information Today
International Journal of Law and Information Technology
Journal of Law and Information Science
Jumetrics Journal
Jumetrics Journal: Quarterly Journal of the American Bar
Laserdisk Professional
Law/Technology
Office Administration and Automation
Online

JournalSeek has a subcategory for Information Retrieval (23 titles) and another one for Information Storage (37 titles).

mation Retrieval (23 titles) and another one for Information Storage (37 titles). The two subcategories should be combined into a single Information Storage & Retrieval subcategory.

Currently, the database can be searched only by title words and ISSN. Obviously, searching in the description could increase recall of relevant titles, while also allowing for more precise searches. For example, when I want to find all the journals whose descriptions mention the Web, even though their title may not include this word or its synonym, JournalSeek can't help. Technically, it is a no-brainer to offer such a search option.

You may prefer objective reviews to publishers' blurbs, but you have no guarantee the review has the facts correctly—even if it came from the respected publication *Magazine for Libraries*, as is the case for Ulrich's. Its review of *ONLINE*, for example, describes it as a monthly publication and that "the Java-enabled "web-

zine," with reviews, lists of useful resources, and feature articles on web-related topics, includes much of the same information that is in the print edition." I don't think either is true, not to mention the fact that the review (in spite of its date) is based at best on the 20th anniversary issue, now 7 years old, so I would not consider those "objective" reviews superior—even if you pay for them.

As a bonus, Genamics links you to the Openly-jake version of the jake database to find out the extent of coverage of the journal you are interested in. It is more comprehensive than the original database, but less current than the SFUjake database; even with its limitations, it is a worthy add-on.



the pan

PUBLIST

I praised PubList [www.publist.com], the free serials directory created from Ulrich's when it was launched in the fall of 1998, and continued to do so after it was acquired by Infotrieve in the Spring of 2000. I liked that it added a new feature, linking from some of the journals to their tables of contents. But about 18 months ago, Infotrieve disabled some features in PubList, claiming it would undergo technical improvements. Later, it started to require registration to use the database. I found no improvements, just more and more dust and rust, contrary to what the improve-

ment banner promised. As of December 2002, the PubList database still was advertised as having records for 150,000 serials—just as it did when it started 4-1/2 years before. Neglect is the most likely explanation for the sad state of PubList.

Records were not updated, even though they were in Ulrich's. For example, PubList claims that *ONLINE* is still edited by Nancy Garman and published by Online, Inc. Nancy's last issue as editor was July/August 1996, and *ONLINE* has been published by Information Today, Inc. since October 2001. Moreover, when you search for Online by publisher there are no results. Neither will you find anything when searching for Information Today as a publisher, or Elsevier, or any other publisher. This option is just as dysfunctional as browsing by subject—which at least warns you that it is not available.

You will find no warning when using the advanced search option, but entering any word in the title cell will yield an empty results screen. When you enter the name of the publisher into the publisher cell, you get the error message that "No title was entered for search." Well, the information on the search template clearly and repeatedly states that you may leave one or two of the query cells empty. You still can search by title or ISSN, but PubList now is not even a shadow of its original version, and is hardly worth the free registration.

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ONLINE

Title	Publisher	Alerting	Full Record
Title: ONLINE			
Publication Type: Academic/Scholarly Publication			
Status: Active	Frequency: Six times a year		
ISSN: 0146-5422			
Country: US	Language: English		
Editor: Nancy Garman			

Publisher: Online Incorporated
Publisher Address: 213 Danbury Road, Wilton, CT 06897
Publisher Contact Information: (800)248-8466, (203)761-1456, EMAIL: jennifer@onlineinc.com, INTERNET: http://www.onlineinc.com, Fax: (203)761-1444

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Browse by Subject

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Search Tips

Publist is undergoing technical improvements. Some of the features you use regularly may not be available while we enhance the site.

▲ PubList's browsing by subject is dysfunctional.

◀ PubList thinks Nancy Garman still edits *ONLINE*, something she hasn't done since mid-1996.