

# TO COMPLETE, NOT TO COMPETE — THE CASE FOR A HUNGARIAN ONLINE DATABASE AND INFORMATION SERVICE

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**Abstract:** Producers of the large, internationally available databases provide an excellent coverage of the literature of the most highly industrialized countries. They are right to do so because the mass usage of their online information services comes from the very same countries.

Researchers, scientists and practitioners of smaller countries, however, might be interested also in the scientific technical literature produced in countries of compatible economical, technological infrastructure, development level, size and/or population.

A complementary database and online service developed locally can fill the gap. This approach is illustrated by a Hungarian language online database service with document and subject coverage calibrated to the information needs of the local user community.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Access to international online database services was received with enthusiasm in Hungary as well. The rapid and very flexible access to the enormous amount of bibliographic information enchanted the potential Hungarian user community. But at the same time posed the question for the producer of a domestic database: is there a future for its services? Will anybody use a Hungarian bibliographic database with computer and information science subject scope when the well-known databases like INSPEC, COMPENDEX, LISA, MICROCOMPUTER INDEX, INTERNATIONAL SOFTWARE DATABASE are rapidly accessible with the Computer Database from Management Contents at the doorstep?

My answer is of a "yes-if" type. Yes, there is a future if this database can complete the services offered by the giant online vendors. Yes, if it can offer something sought for and not received from the large vendors.

## 2 SPECIAL FEATURES OF THE DATABASE AND ONLINE SERVICE

In the following, I will discuss some of the specialties of our online database and services which make me think that they can survive.

### 2.1 Document Selection

Producers of large databases abstract and index several hundred journals, conference proceedings. They provide an extensive coverage of the primary literature of the United States, France, England, Japan, Germany and Canada. But they mostly ignore the industrial literature of the small countries. They have to ignore them because they must concentrate on the core journals, publications of those countries mentioned above, as the overwhelming majority

of online users are interested in the American, British, Canadian, French, German and Japanese literature.

But there are more and more users who are also very interested in the literature of smaller, less developed countries whose economical, cultural, technological, infrastructural levels are more compatible with their own ones. This offers the chance to learn about problems and solutions of similar order of magnitude. Therefore, references to this literature are also sought for but in smaller volume, thus the large database producers cannot be expected to heavily invest in processing, abstracting/indexing of non-English language publications of small countries.

These countries can, however, build their own database according to their special requirements. The Norwegian Center for Informatics gives a text book example for this by creating databases containing references - among others - to Scandinavian literature, some of them searchable by Swedish, Norwegian, Danish and Finnish index terms, and providing abstracts in Norwegian and in English as well.

Our company has also jumped onto this bandwagon. With the advancement of computer research, development and application in Hungary the related trade literature has also increased considerably.

But this literature - with some exception - is not abstracted/indexed by foreign A/I services because of the reasons mentioned above. Hungarian computer specialists, however, would like to get references to Hungarian journal articles, conference papers and research reports as well. Therefore, we dedicate more and more efforts to abstract/index the domestic literature. By doing so, we also provide the bibliographic control function of the national literature - in the field of computer science.

As there is an interest for Czechoslovakian and Polish literature, due to the above mentioned reasons, we abstract/index journals of these countries more intensively than the British/American producers of computer science databases.

This shift in our abstracting policy does not imply the exclusion of the very important Anglo-American literature. It just means more selectivity. We concentrate on the core journals as perceived by our user community. And we have quite a good picture about this because the company runs not only information-documentation services but also a library. Thus circulation, inter-library loan and copy request statistics are available and are very instructive in calibrating our abstracting policy and practice.

## 2.2 Bibliographic records in Hungarian language

Though the Hungarian computer scientists, researchers and practitioners read English, everybody - especially users - are much more at ease with their mother tongue. Therefore, the title translations, Hungarian descriptors and abstracts of the bibliographic records are a definite asset. These certainly orient the users effectively in the decision to read or to have translated the original document. Hungarian language subject indexing made it necessary to develop a Hungarian thesaurus of computer science.

## 2.3 Free online browsing in the bibliographic database

By the generous support of the company, there is a public access terminal in the library for browsing the database free of charge, just as any traditional references source. The time for online browsing is limited practically, only by the length of patron queue waiting for the terminal. The other limitation is that no print-out can be requested.

Learning the potentials of the online search, users are more inclined to

ask for the fee based service from the database: compilation of bibliographies and/or delivery of SDI services.

#### 2.4 Immediate delivery of search results and source documents

Receiving the result of a search from abroad takes 8-10 days which is quite good from the viewpoint of postal services concerned, but not for the impatient user who would like to get the search results immediately. Well, the user can do that if the search is done in our database. This advantage, however, will disappear with the installation of an intelligent terminal equipped with correspondence quality printer for online TYPES, as bibliographies of small and medium size bibliographies will be TYPED rather than PRINTED.

As regards the source documents referenced in the bibliographies made from our database, they are available next room, in the public library so the user can request a copy of an article, a conference paper or charge a book out - unless it is on loan.

#### 2.5 Less expensive search fees

The 60-80 dollars hourly rate for internationally available databases, though very expensive is less of a hindrance to the extensive use than the very high telecommunication fees which increase considerably the search costs further.

Searching in our database costs less and will be much less expensive if we can convert to a dedicated micro from the IBM 370 which now stores the 30 MByte database of 60,000 records.

### 3 THE SERVICE POLICY

We have now access to DIALOG, DATASTAR and to our own local system.

Whether we use the foreign services or our own one, depends on the nature of the search request and on the preferences of the user. If it is about the use of computers in geophysics or geology, we search in GEOREF or GEORCHIVE only; if it is about fodder optimization, we go straight into AGRICOLA or CAB and forget about our database which has hardly anything about these subjects. However, if the request is for structured programming in BASIC or database management systems or computer aided design, or generally speaking: hardware and software subject or common applications, we do the searching first in our database. If that is not enough then we do an additional search in INSPEC or Microcomputer Index, or whichever other one seems to be the best. This means that we apply an optionally two-tier system based on our knowledge of the different databases and service facilities.

### 4 CONCLUSION

The more and more widespread accessibility to the online database supermarkets does not necessarily imply that there is no room for specialized single database local services. Especially in the non-anglophone, small countries whose literature is not covered by the giant database producers.

The computerization which has originally been introduced to streamline the production of the traditional printed abstracting journals, to produce machine readable records for computer controlled photocomposition devices will certainly lead to the online availability of the machine readable versions of the printed national A/I journals. And just as printed international and national abstracting/indexing services could coexist for a long time, so are believed their online counterparts in the age of tremendously decreasing computing cost and rapidly increasing storage capacity. The necessity of

this approach of creating databases of local, regional interest in national languages was voiced also on the Annual Meeting of EUSIDIC Conference last year as many of you heard and is being justified by the existence of Spanish, Dutch, Russian and Bulgarian databases which are described to you in the sessions of this very meeting of these days.

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