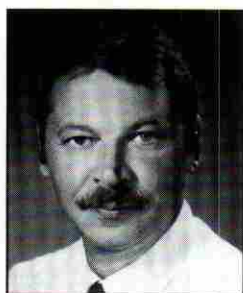


# CD-ROM currents

## Who's Doing What in the CD-ROM Publishing Realm?

by  
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▼  
**While CD-ROM  
database providers  
are trying out the  
Web, they are by no  
means abandoning  
CD-ROM publishing.**

Has CD-ROM database publishing taken a back seat to Web database publishing? It depends how you look at it. These days everyone publishes something on the Web. It's cheap because Web authoring tools and space allocated by a service provider are free. It's also "cheap" because the vast majority of Web "publications" are nothing more than classified ads for corporations and individuals alike. If you measure in megabytes the volume of publications on the Web versus on CD-ROM, the latter can't hold a candle to the former. But if you limit your criteria to real databases, the comparison is much more realistic.

I hasten to add before I am stoned that there are indeed many Web publications that have substantial, valuable, information-rich content. However, genuine databases with multiple indexes that are browsable and searchable via a powerful search engine are few and far between on the Web. And most of them are not free, although there are some impressive exceptions. I think the question can be best answered if we look at some of the key publishers of professional CD-ROM databases to see what they have done in the Web and the CD-ROM arenas in 1996.

### Major CD-ROM Publishers

If we look at the 1996 activities of the largest publishers of professional CD-ROM databases that have jumped on the Web bandwagon, we see varying

trends but by no means the abandonment of CD-ROM publishing.

OVID, which was the first to offer top-quality Web access to many of its databases, does not seem to be slowing down its CD-ROM publishing activity at all. Just this year we have seen the release of such new titles on CD-ROM as the *Biomedical Collection II* database, *sociofile*, *SPORT Discus*, and some new H.W. Wilson databases parallel to the launch of a superb Web service that nicely complements one of the most powerful DOS and Windows CD-ROM software implementations. OVID promises to release the following CD-ROM databases soon: *Books in Print*, *Books Out of Print*, *Cambridge Life Sciences Collection*, *Environmental Science and Pollution Management Abstracts*, *Aquatic Science and Fisheries Abstracts*, the *GPO Monthly Catalog*, plus NTIS and PAIS databases.

IAC has come out with two impressive Web services this year: SearchBank, and the nifty IAC INSITE service. While on the CD-ROM front it kept a relatively low profile in terms of launching new titles; it has probably remained the producer and publisher of the largest number of CD-ROM titles subscribed to by public and academic libraries (titles such as *Magazine Index Plus*, *Magazine ASAP*, *Health Reference Center*, and *General BusinessFile*). It is also likely to have retained its leadership in terms of CD-ROM market share in public and academic libraries. This may explain

why this year it released only a single new CD-ROM database: *General Reference Center Select*. Its commitment to remain the most popular choice is indicated by the fact that a Windows version of the CD-ROM software is to be released early next year.

**SilverPlatter** has developed a spiffy interface for many of its databases on the Web with some rather creative features (such as sorting of the results by several criteria), and the company offers a laudable collection of more than a dozen free sampler databases. It has published more professional CD-ROM databases since 1986 than any of its competitors, and already in 1996 it has released an impressive collection of new ones. These include many abstracts databases from Wilson, the *COMPENDEX* database, *Current Contents*, *Exceptional Child Education Reviews*, *EIU International Business Newsletters*, *LABORDOC*, and *Political Science Abstracts*. It is also likely to release some CD-ROMs from the Bowker family of databases, such as *Books in Print* and *Library and Information Science Abstracts*, all of them sporting the prettiest (though not the smartest) Windows interface.

**EBSCO** has launched its Web service with its own gigantic MasterFile database and recently introduced a relatively small but useful library science database free of charge on the Web. While working on its Web service, EBSCO has maintained its strong CD-ROM publishing activity. It has enhanced its *Health Source*, *Business Source*, and *Middle Search* databases (now all of them have a Plus version) and released the following new titles: *HealthSTAR*, *Canadian Magazine Article Summaries*, *Canadian MAS FullTEXT Elite* and *Select*, and a new edition of its *MasterPlots* series about drama, poetry, and nonfiction. Soon, a new version of *Primary Search* is to be released that will feature EBSCO's *Encyclopedia of Animals*, the *World Almanac for Kids*, the *World Almanac of the USA*, and *Funk & Wagnalls New Encyclopedia*. Surprisingly, no Windows version for the software has been announced yet.

**Knight-Ridder Information's** DIALOG has launched two Web-based ser-

vices: *ScienceBase* and *BusinessBase*, along with free access to its *Bluesheets* and *Chronolog* databases. It has also released a nice Windows version of its old—but still excellent—DOS CD-ROM software and a number of CD-ROM databases, including *Government and Defense Directory*, *Canadian Business and Current Affairs Vintage Disc*, *OHS Material Safety Data Sheets*, and *OnDisc Pascal*. While DIALOG was very hesitant about publishing CD-ROMs in the late 80s, by now the company has come to like doing so. With Web access to only a small fraction of its database collection, DIALOG is clearly indicating that CD-ROM publishing definitely has not taken a back seat to Web database publishing.

**H.W. Wilson** has very modest Web presence but has released a new version of its DOS software. More importantly, it has also released the abstracts versions of many of its highly respected indexes. Wilson is clearly not going to abandon its CD-ROM platform for the Web.

**UMI** is the only one among the major CD-ROM database publishers that has not come out with any new CD-ROM titles, probably because the company poured all its energy into developing its ProQuest Direct service. While currently it is accessible only through client software, ProQuest Direct is likely to be implemented for Web-browser access before the end of the year.

### Minor CD-ROM Publishers

**OCLC** has been keeping a relatively low profile in the CD-ROM arena ever since it discontinued publication of its *Computer Library*, *Music Library*, and *Education Library* and licensed the content to SilverPlatter. Parallel to the development of the Web version of its widely successful FirstSearch service, it also managed to endow its CAT CD450 CD-ROM database with potent Windows-based software.

**Bowker** introduced a free version of *Books Out of Print* on the Web site of its parent company, Reed Reference, and finally released the long overdue production version of excellent Windows software for the *Books in Print* CD-

ROM. Let's hope the rest of the Bowker product line will also get this Windows interface-lift, although that is not a sure thing since another Reed Reference CD-ROM, *Marquis Who's Who* database, was released with the FolioView Windows software.

**Aries** has long been sticking to what it does extraordinarily well: publishing CD-ROM versions of MEDLINE and other files of the National Library of Medicine with the only software that can really handle natural language queries with stunningly precise results and an attractive interface. In 1996, it introduced an impressive Web service for MEDLINE (free for a month) accessible through any Web browser, and it offered a client software-based alternative as well. Probably before the end of the year, it will release a version of *Psychological Abstracts* on CD-ROM with its splendid software.

**NISC**—a CD-ROM publisher that is not as well known as it deserves to be—has introduced a number of new CD-ROM titles this year to add to its best-sellers such as *PsycLIT* and *sociofile*. These include such niche titles as *South African Studies*, *Inventory of Marriage & Family Literature*, *Women's Resources International*, and most recently *Contemporary Women's Issues*. With this many new titles—and more in the offing—NISC is obviously committed to the CD-ROM platform. Early next year, the company is to release a Windows version of its cerebral software.

Overall, my impression is that publishers of professional CD-ROM databases remain committed to this medium, whether they have thus far only modestly experimented with Web services or already established a strong presence on the Web. The consumer database arena is somewhat different, and it deserves a close look in an upcoming column. ▲

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