

# modem notes

for everything you can access by computer and telephone

P.O. Box 408472 • Chicago, IL 60640 • 312/764-7407

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## Online Literature-Retrieval Systems — Getting Started

Online database searching offers something for everyone—the businessperson trying to spot industry trends, the parent helping with homework, the physician seeking information to support a suspected diagnosis, the university student writing a thesis, the continuing scholar pursuing an interest.

Hundreds of databases offer computerized indexes to journals on virtually any subject; others can provide the full text of newspaper or magazine articles; and still more offer financial information on companies or directory information for individuals, businesses or associations. If you do not search online already, there really isn't much to keep you from becoming an experienced online searcher. Here, then, is a checklist of what you need to begin. With each issue of MODEM NOTES we will be bringing you more detailed information on these subjects as well as database reviews and comparisons.

### 1. DO YOU HAVE THE RIGHT EQUIPMENT?

You need an ASCII-coded personal computer or word processor which has terminal software, and a

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Dear Reader:

Welcome to the first issue of MODEM NOTES--for everything you can access with computer and telephone!!

By now you know that a modem is more than a peripheral...it's a link to the outside world.

Without the world of other computers, databases, bulletin boards, and other modem-accessible services, your computer's scope would be sorely limited. And chances are good you wouldn't get nearly the mileage from your personal computer.

Until now, however, there's been no single source for information about modems, databases, and the rapidly growing telephone-computer market.

More importantly, there's been no source for personal computer users to provide search tips, applications and sources of free information concerning the many online databases available to them. Only information specialists have had ready access to this information.

As an information specialist, I have been searching online databases for a number of years. The online world is a fascinating one! Now that so many people have taken to personal computing, this online universe is opening to them too. We at MODEM NOTES hope to make their searching a little bit easier, and a lot more fruitful!

With news on equipment, new databases and related products, we will keep you informed on the industry's latest--information that was previously monitored mostly by librarians who were searching online. Now you can access indexes to thousands of periodicals as librarians do in major research centers. You can find patents or book reviews, scan microcomputer literature indexes, access online encyclopedias, find financial information on companies, monitor industry trends, send electronic mail -- all from your micro. If you are a professional, you may use the specialized databases for medicine, law, engineering, chemistry, management, finances, investments, and others developed especially for you.

MODEM NOTES will bring you news from the online industry, tips for saving money online, ideas for developing search strategies, reviews of new databases, sources of free information, as well as anecdotes and humorous searches. (see "Whatever Turns You Online"!)

So enjoy this issue! There's news here you can use!

And we hope you'll take a moment to fill out the subscription form in the back and to pass the word to your friends and colleagues about this new publication.

Sincerely,

*Katherine Ackerman*

Katherine Ackerman

Editor and Publisher

serial interface. You will also need a telephone and a modem. You will need a monitor (or T.V.) or printer on which to read your results, however you needn't have both (a printer is highly desirable). There are some very inexpensive portable terminals with built in printers and acoustic couplers for under \$2000. Personal computers priced under \$800 can also be made to communicate. We will discuss "how to choose a modem" in a future issue for those of you who are in the market for one.

## 2. HOW TO SELECT A VENDOR.

We will be bringing you lots of information to help you choose! In this issue don't miss the scoop on DIALOG vs. KNOWLEDGE INDEX written by someone in the know! In this issue, we've listed the major bibliographic database vendors -future issues will cover non-bibliographic databases. Start by writing to each of these companies and asking for free information about their services. After you receive lists of databases, read about those databases which interest you and write to THEIR producers. Ask for journals lists such as those listed inside this issue. Compare costs, hours of availability, baud rates allowed, and the number of other databases available from that service which are of interest to you. Upcoming issues will provide you with much of this information.

## 3. THE PASSWORD, PLEASE?

Once you've selected a vendor or two, fill out the forms they send. You will then be sent a password. Also, consider whether the vendor charges a sign-up fee or charges only for use. Subscription fees charged against

future use are common, and that gives you some time to get acquainted with the system. In most cases there will be clear instructions for getting online.

## 4. GETTING TRAINED

One of the considerations in selecting a vendor is how much time and money you are willing to spend for training. To become an efficient DIALOG searcher (and efficiency is important at \$75 per hour!), you really need to attend a training session. DIALOG offers these across the country. They last one and a half days and cost \$135. It does take some time to master Dialog, considering that there are over 50 commands you can use! With BRS AFTER DARK or KNOWLEDGE INDEX though, you train yourself on free time covered by your sign-up fee. With those systems, there is much less to know in order to search effectively, but you don't have nearly the flexibility that you do with the more complex systems. Be sure to ask the vendor whether the smaller home user systems contain the complete databases or only subsets.


## 5. LEARN HOW THE DATABASE IS CONSTRUCTED.

The indexing and the way the abstracts are produced will affect the way you search. You will need to spend time becoming familiar with the printed materials of both the vendor and the individual producer of the database. Different systems have different searching languages and protocols, and you may have to study diligently if you plan to use more than one system. Mastering just one of the systems designed for personal computers should not be difficult. For free materials that will keep you up on latest developments, keep an eye on our listings.

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## 6. DESIGNING A SEARCH STRATEGY.

If you are searching one of the larger systems such as DIALOG, you will want to keep paper and pencil handy. Write down proper or company names; decide how you will truncate or expand your search; and develop two alternative strategies--- one to use if your postings are too numerous, the other to use if your postings are too few. Search strategies are a specialty at MODEM NOTES and we will bring you ideas for improving yours with every issue. See the article on recall vs. precision in this month's copy.

## 7. LOGGING ON.

It's easy if you follow the steps sent to you by the vendor. The basic steps are the same for all the bibliographic utilities. First, select a local phone number from one of the lists provided by the vendor for the telecommunication services such as TELENET, TYMNET, or UNINET. This is your way to connect with the vendor's computer without making a long-distance phone call. Most major cities and many smaller ones have local numbers to call. Telecommunications charges range between \$6-\$10 per hour and are billed through the vendor. After dialing in, you will hear a tone which indicates it is time to place the phone in the acoustic coupler or modem. You will see a connect message on your screen. Follow the directions on your sign-on sheet which is supplied by the vendor.

## 8. AVOID THE T.T. S!

Even professional database searchers sometimes get nervous while searching online. In the research community it's called T.T. or Terminal Trembles. If you get flustered or tangled, you can always logoff, revise your

strategy and give it another shot later.

## Yours for the Asking!

One of the best ways to find out whether a database will be useful to you is to find out what's IN it...And one of the best ways to do that is to take advantage of free search aids offered by the producers. This column will keep you posted on what's available at no charge. This month we take a look at search aids for business databases online with DIALOG.

THE COMPLETE JOURNALS LIST FOR ABI/INFORM. Write: Data Courier Inc. 620 South Fifth St., Louisville, KY 40202.

DISCLOSURE II SEARCH GUIDE (specify DIALOG OR DOW JONES system).  
GUIDE TO SEC CORPORATE FILINGS.  
SEC FILING COMPANIES.  
SAMPLE OF SEC NEWS DIGEST.  
DISCLOSURE APPLICATIONS PORTFOLIO.  
DISCLOSURE ONLINE NEWS  
Write: DISCLOSURE, 5161 River Rd.  
Bethesda, MD 20816

STANDARD AND POOR'S CORPORATION RECORDS ONLINE USER'S MANUAL.  
Write: S&P, 25 Broadway, New York, NY 10004

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS INDEXED IN TRADE AND INDUSTRY INDEX. Write: Information Access Corp., 404 Sixth Ave., Menlo Park, CA 94025

LITERATURE PACKAGE AND QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER. Write: Online Customer Service, Predicasts, 11001 Cedar Ave, Cleveland, OH 44106. 800-321-6388. 216-795-3000 in Ohio.

LIST OF JOURNALS INDEXED IN MANAGEMENT CONTENTS. Write: Management Contents, 2265 Carlson Dr., Suite 5000, Northbrook, IL 60062

Don't forget to mention MODEM NOTES!



## Access

Q. What's the difference between the terms DATABASE, DATABASE PRODUCER, AND DATABASE VENDOR?

A. A DATABASE is a collection of information which is processed by a publisher or organization and published in computer-readable form. Many types of databases are available online, but they generally fall into two categories, reference and source.

REFERENCE databases point users to another source, such as a document, an organization or an individual for further information.

Reference databases may be bibliographic or referral.

Bibliographic databases consist of citations to printed materials such as books, patents, reports or journals. Searching by subject, author, or other categories provides the user with a list of relevant titles, patents, dissertations, proceedings, etc.

Referral databases contain references and sometimes abstracts or summaries of non-published information. Such databases can refer users to individuals, audiovisual materials or other non-print media for further information.

SOURCE databases are those that contain the complete information or the full text of the original source of information. Source databases may be numeric, textual-numeric, or full text.

Numeric databases contain statistics, census data, securities, prices and other data.

Textual-numeric databases are those which combine textual and numeric data.

Full text databases provide the complete text of an item, such as a newspaper, a court decision, or a directory listing.

Many different companies and government agencies produce databases; over 1300 are publicly available for searching. These companies and agencies are the DATABASE PRODUCERS. In order for a database to be made widely available, it is often offered through a VENDOR, which in turn makes many databases available to end users. This is so that the searcher, very often a librarian or information broker, does not have to make individual arrangements with each database producer, pay separate bills for each database searched or learn separate protocols for each database.

The searcher instead need learn only the protocols of the major vendors which will be used. For example, over 180 databases can be accessed using DIALOG'S protocols and commands. SDC, BRS, DIALOG and other vendors each have different search languages.

The SOURCE and COMPUSERVE are also vendors, and they offer hundreds of databases. They are more often called INFORMATION UTILITIES because they provide an enormous range of services, including games, shopping and banking.

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We will be covering all the different vendors in upcoming issues of MODEM NOTES.

## Applications

### THE PROBLEM:

A marketing director of a large corporation, following the Tylenol crisis in the news, wanted information on how to counteract rumors and adverse publicity.

### THE SOLUTION:

The search was run on ABI/INFORM on the DIALOG system. It took less than four minutes.

?SS IMAGE/DE OR PUBLIC RELATIONS

1 1649 IMAGE/DE  
2 1282 PUBLIC RELATIONS  
3 2795 1 OR 2

?SS CRIS?S/DE OR EMERGENCIES/DE  
OR RUMOR? OR POISONING?

4 1431 CRIS?S/DE  
5 369 EMERGENCIES/DE  
6 209 RUMOR?  
7 17 POISONING?  
8 1985 4 OR 5 OR 6 OR 7

?C3AND8

9 52 3AND8

?T9/6/1-6

9/6/1/  
82029712 ID NO:82029712  
The Fight to Save Tylenol

9/6/2  
82026235 ID NO:82026235  
A Crisis Management Plan

9/6/3  
82011250 ID NO:82011250  
A Case of Crisis Communication

9/6/4  
82003388 ID NO:82003388  
The President's Been Shot!...He's  
Here!

9/6/5  
81027554 ID NO:81027554  
Crisis Public Relations

9/6/6  
81016582 ID NO:81016582  
Tilting at the Rumor Mill

### Search Strategy:

ABI/Inform was selected for this search because it contains summaries of articles appearing in more than 500 business and management publications worldwide. The file dates back to 1971.

SS is a search command taken from the DIALOG manual. It means "super select," and is a way to perform a number of operations in one step.

Using a ? in the middle of the word allows the searcher to retrieve "crises" or "crisis."

/DE indicates that this term must appear in the descriptor field which appears at the end of a citation. Descriptors are indexing terms. When the /DE or other suffix is not used, it indicates the term may appear in any of the fields of the records. /DE broadens the search. For example, Image/DE would include brand image, corporate image or product image.

? is a way of truncating in order to obtain both singular and plural terms.

Combine sets 3 and 8.

Because there are fifty-two citations to sift through, format 6 is used to include just the title, a money-saving endeavor. Format 5 provides the title, citation and an abstract.

Adapted from OUTPUT, Jan/Feb 1983, with permission of Data Courier, producers of ABI/INFORM.

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## Introduction to Online Information Services

### *A Modem Notes Seminar*

THERE'S A WORLD OF INFORMATION AT YOUR FINGERTIPS!  
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SHOPPING AND BANKING ARE AMONG THE MANY SERVICES YOU CAN ACCESS  
WITH YOUR MICRO. CONFUSED ABOUT WHICH ONES TO CHOOSE? HOW TO  
SIGN UP? WHAT EQUIPMENT YOU NEED?

LEARN ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW TO GET "ONLINE"!

OUR SEMINARS DISCUSS:

- \* The online universe- how'd we get here?
- \* What equipment is needed?
- \* TYMNET, TELENET, UNINET
- \* The SOURCE, COMPUSERVE, DELPHI, ELECTRONES
- \* DOW JONES NEWS RETRIEVAL, NYT INFOBANK, LEXIS, NEXIS
- \* KNOWLEDGE INDEX, BRS AFTER DARK, ORBIT, NEWSNET
- \* Bulletin Boards
- \* Saving money online
- \* Toll free numbers and free user aids
- \* Publications

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ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY, STATE, ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE \_\_\_\_\_ COMPUTER BRAND I USE \_\_\_\_\_

SYSTEMS I NOW SEARCH \_\_\_\_\_



## Links

A recent WALL STREET JOURNAL article says that we may face higher phone bills when using our phones for data transmission. One user's bill rose from \$9 to \$45 per month after the phone company found out he was using his phone for computer messages!

The DISCLOSURE II database is now available through the I.P. Sharp Associates system. DISCLOSURE II provides information for over 8500 public companies that file with the SEC. The other systems which offer DISCLOSURE II are DIALOG, DOW JONES NEWS/RETRIEVAL, Control Data Corp. Business Information Systems, and the Bank Administration Institute.

Mead Data Central tried to tame the tempers of Chicago area librarians in Chicago by treating them to hors d'oeuvres and cocktails July 19. The librarians are angry about Mead's insistence that users must lease MDC equipment in order to access their databases, NEXIS and LEXIS (full text news and case law retrieval, respectively). Since the company now will be the sole provider of the NEW YORK TIMES INFORMATION BANK as well, many companies have been forced to go along with Mead's rules. This is a strain on budgets as well as space.

Now, however, Mead says that personal computers can access the databases. In reality, it's not that simple. Mead has released the software specifications and it is up to the individual computer manufacturer to produce the software to allow access. IBM PC users in Chicago and Washington should have access to the systems by the end of the year, the company says.

WORLD BOOK ENCYCLOPEDIA has ceased publishing its online edition which was available on COMPUSERVE. It's been replaced with Grolier's ACADEMIC AMERICAN ENCYCLOPEDIA. AAE contains about 32,000 articles, a third of which will be updated annually.

## Database Reviews

Here's a system that is fun to use, and VERY responsive!

ElectroNews is a computer-accessed, interactive investment advisory service. Publisher Jim Crawford started EN because he felt there was a need for timely, accurate, and reasonably priced investment and financial information.

A staff of nine editorial advisors with experience in compensation plans, real estate law, banking, taxes and investments provide the expertise in the following categories: personal finance, taxes, real estate investments, investments in stocks, bonds, metals, and more. Among those serving on ElectroNews' board are Robert D. George, vice president of the European American Bank, and Richard R. Solem, president of the Equity Fund Group.

A Readers' Forum allows users to "talk back," ask questions, vote on the news they want covered, leave messages to the editor, post bulletins or correspond privately with other users.

Crawford feels that there is a gaping hole in the market and his service will fill the gap. Services like the SOURCE, he feels, provide information that is little different from what a newspaper provides. He also believes that the 200-page users' manual and endless menus are frustrating to many users.

## modem notes

ElectroNews is broadcast on the GTE Telemail System just like electronic mail. GTE is easy to use, has a clear user's manual and requires few commands to be learned. Online tutorials are clear and helpful.

MODEM NOTES tested the ElectroNews System and found it easy to use, referring to only the GTE users' concise manual. We liked the fact that an experienced user can easily skip menus, and even a new user has only a few menus to view before quickly getting to the actual information. Regular users can retrieve only those items which have appeared since the last online session.

Here's what we found on the system. We checked the taxes bulletin board and found a message from the editor written only a few days prior, regarding the recent IRS ruling on tax credits to employers who hire disadvantaged teens. We then moved on to investments, and read about a "blockbuster new drug that could lead its manufacturer to unprecedented earnings." We also discovered that a stock recommended a month ago by ElectroNews Advisor Chuck Waldo, vice pres. of Centennial State Securities was up 33% (from \$3 to slightly over \$4).

After moving around on the system a bit more, we left a message for the editor. Sure enough, the next day we received a phone call from him in response. Had we been regular subscribers, we would have found a message in our box instead. We found the staff of ElectroNews very responsive and interested in user feedback.

ElectroNews will be marketed through retail computer stores. Subscription rates are \$178 per year. Hourly rates are \$16/hour during business hours and \$9/hour

from 6p.m. to 9p.m. weekdays and all day on weekends.

For more information on ElectroNews, write P.O. Box 148, Leesburg, VA 22075, or call 703-592-3370.

For more information on GTE Telemail, call 800-368-3407.

Tell them Modem Notes sent you!

## Whatever Turns You Online

by Richard Rott

HAMLET: "Did you speak to it?"

HORATIO: "My Lord, I did, but answer it made none."

To get an answer or not to get an answer! THAT is the question!

Database protocol, by definition, dictates that a search query be syntactically correct in order for it to be understood by the host computer system. If a query contains a SYNTAX ERROR, the host system will reject the statement and display some kind of error message, such as "invalid command code."

It is possible, however, for a query to be free of syntax errors and still not produce the expected search results. If this happens and you know that the database does indeed contain the information you are seeking, a LOGIC ERROR has occurred. A logic error means that the computer understood the query but the searcher did not express it properly in terms of achieving the desired results.

Logic errors can be difficult to identify. Quantity of search result is not necessarily an indication of the effectiveness of search logic. A large number of results or "hits" is of no value if the searcher retrieves the wrong information. In the same light, a search which

delivers no hits is not necessarily an ineffective search. The information may simply not exist on that database.

There is simply no substitute for knowing the protocol of the online information retrieval systems that you have occasion to use.

"Here's the challenge, read it: I warrant there's vinegar and pepper in it."

Perform an online search in a database of your choosing for records that contain the phrase "to be or not to be."

Take a stab at it and let us know which databases you searched, the search queries you used and any special considerations or problems you encountered. Send us a copy of your search. A future column will be devoted to your responses.

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Richard Rott is a Librarian/Systems Analyst at the CHICAGO TRIBUNE. He holds a Master's degree in Library and Information Studies from Berkeley and has a background in computer programming.

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#### RECALL VS PRECISION

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As the above item discusses, a search which retrieves a large number of hits is not necessarily a "good" search. Likewise, a search which delivers nothing is not necessarily incorrect.

What we are talking about here are two principles of searching which are inversely proportional to each other: RECALL and PRECISION.

Recall is the percentage of relevant items retrieved by the search.

Precision is the percentage of items retrieved which are relevant to the search.

If every item which would be useful to you is pulled up by your search, you have very good recall. However, to get EVERYTHING means you will have to put up with some false hits, too. It's not usually possible to get absolutely everything without a few unwanted items. If you printed everything on the database, your recall would be 100%. Unfortunately, your precision would be terrible, and your bill would be huge!

If, on the otherhand, your precision is excellent, and every item is a relevant one, there is a very good chance that you have missed something along the way. That is why your recall would be low.

High recall corresponds to low precision. High precision corresponds to low recall.

A good searcher must decide which is the most important quality for the search. And as you've probably guessed, the answer is usually a compromise.

## **Access to Information: Dialog vs. Knowledge Index**

EDITOR'S NOTE: In response to questions we have been getting regarding the difference between Lockheed's two systems, DIALOG and KNOWLEDGE INDEX, we asked Ron Kaminecki, Manager of the Midwest region of DIALOG to contribute to this article.

DIALOG Information Service provides immediate access to an enormous storehouse of information. It is primarily a bibliographic database, providing citations to articles from popular magazines, professional and trade journals, government



katherine ackerman and associates

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**Examples**

What have been employee reactions to company-sponsored daycare programs?

I need a list of all meat packing plants in a seven state area.

What publishing companies are now involved in cable or videotex?

I'd like any articles which discuss the treatment of diabetes to be sent to me every month.

I'd like mailing labels for executives in the northeast who have purchased by mail in the past.

What newsletters exist for people in the telecommunications industry?

Which companies are involved in telecommuting experiments?

Compile a bibliography on selecting a personal computer.

How can I contact the leading U.S. economists?

and industrial reports, conference papers, newspaper articles, patents and books. DIALOG covers almost every subject imaginable.

Besides citations and abstracts to articles, DIALOG also offers directory-type information, statistical and financial information on products, companies and industries. Many professional subjects are covered - in databases such as Pharmaceutical Index, Index Medicus or Legal Resource Index.

Why is DIALOG the giant of online database companies? It is a product of Lockheed Missiles and Space Co., and the people in the space industry were naturally in the forefront of computer technology. The DIALOG system was developed both internally and under contract for various government agencies with inception back in the early 60s. The first passwords to the system were released in 1972. At that time, only six databases were available. Users could search for the occurrence of words or phrases anywhere in a record. Such a search could be further refined using AND, OR and NOT logic, and the results could be typed out online.

DIALOG grew tremendously, and now, instead of the six original databases, it boasts over 180 databases in practically every scientific, technical and general interest area, with storage of over 80 million records (see the subject list which follows).

Today, the AND, OR, or NOT logical operators have been refined to allow retrieval of finer and finer details. Many cost-cutting commands were added to allow a user to run a search of one database over and over in several databases. Recently, a

"database of databases" (called DIALINDEX) had to be added to allow a searcher to locate the best database for a given topic.

If you believe that the list of databases looks similar to the holdings of a library, you are right. Most of these databases were created by the same publishers who created the hardcopy abstracting and indexing services. So, searchers can have access to these same professional services without ever leaving their desks.

DIALOG offers a great deal of flexibility in terms of searching. Typical database charges are \$75/hour although some public access databases are cheaper. These rates do not include telecommunications charges. Because of the many search features, it is difficult to search DIALOG efficiently without a substantial investment of time and money for proper training. This is why librarians have become so good at searching; after all, they've been doing it for years. In many cases, they can save you money, even if you have to pay a fee for the search.

Is there any way that a person with a limited budget can access the same type of information? The answer is the "mini-DIALOG" system called KNOWLEDGE INDEX. To allow owners of microcomputers to access information online, DIALOG recently introduced a smaller version of the large system, complete with a mini-language. The list of databases available is smaller than on DIALOG, but the actual data are the same. The hours of usage on Knowledge Index are 6pm to 5 am local time, whereas DIALOG is up almost all the time.

KNOWLEDGE INDEX offers a streamlined command structure.

There are only five commands compared to DIALOG'S 50. Along with a smaller selection and fewer allowable commands comes a cut in price. KI costs \$24/ hour including telecommunications charges. The charges are listed at the end of a search and can be charged to American Express, VISA, or Mastercharge. There is no minimum usage fee.

Unlike DIALOG, no training class is necessary in order to search KI. The \$35 startup fee includes a very well-written manual that can have you doing searches after reading only a few pages. To help you practice on the system, KI offers two hours credit to be used in the first month of service. So your \$35 fee nets you a manual and \$48 worth of computer time!

While a search is being done on KI, the user can scan the abstracts provided and can order some of the articles while online at a cost of \$3.50 per article. To do the same thing on DIALOG would incur much higher document delivery costs.

Which system is the right one for you? Write for the most recent lists of databases and find out which system offers the ones you would like to search. Are there others who use your computer? What are their interests? If the shorter list of databases is fine for your purposes and the nighttime access fits into your schedule, then KI may suit your purposes. But if you need to access many databases and think you will need to make use of complete searching capabilities or if you need to search during the day, DIALOG is for you. Of course, there is nothing to stop you from signing up for both systems and comparing for yourself.

For more information, write to DIALOG. See list of bibliographic vendors in this issue.

---

**MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC DATABASE VENDORS**

DIALOG Information Services  
3460 Hillview Avenue  
Palo Alto, CA 94304  
800-2271927

KNOWLEDGE INDEX  
same as above

BRS and BRS AFTER DARK  
1200 Route 7  
Latham, NY 12110  
800-833-4707

LEXIS and NEXIS  
Mead Data Central  
200 Park Ave.  
New York, NY 10166  
212-883-8560

DOW JONES NEWS RETRIEVAL  
P.O. Box 300  
Princeton, NJ 08540  
800-257-5114

SDC Search Service  
2500 Colorado Ave.  
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