

Oceans From a Global Perspective:  
 Marine Science Information Transfer  
 (ed) C.P. Winn  
 IAMS LIC

**COMPACT DISC DATABASES IN MARINE SCIENCE LIBRARIES:  
 A PANEL DISCUSSION**

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**PANELISTS:** Michael Gomez (MG), Alfred Wegener Institut fur Polar und Meeresforschung; Kay Hale (KH), Rosenstiel School of Marine & Atmospheric Science Library; Janice Meadows (JM), Virginia Institute of Marine Science Library; Pam Mofjeld (PM), University of Washington Fisheries-Oceanography Library; Tom Moritz (TM), California Academy of Sciences Library; Jonathan Sears (JS), Cambridge Scientific Abstracts; Carolyn Winn (CW), Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution Library.

The panel discussed their libraries' experience with compact disc database(s). The panelists shared practical information of benefit to the audience and other panelists. The panel jointly addressed the questions numbered below. A specific response for a panelist's library is noted by the initials of the corresponding panelist.

*1) What compact disc database(s) are in place and what was the purchase rationale?*

All libraries have Cambridge Scientific's AQUATIC SCIENCES AND FISHERIES ABSTRACTS (ASFA) disc(s). In addition to ASFA, CW has Bowker's BOOKS IN PRINT PLUS (BIP) disc covering 695,000 titles listed in Bowker's in-print tools. In addition to ASFA, TM has Cambridge Scientific's LIFE SCIENCES COLLECTION (LIFE) disc corresponding to several abstracting journals and sample discs for Silver Platter's MEDLINE, OCLC's ERIC, University Microfilm's DISSERTATION ABSTRACTS, and WILSONDISC.

Libraries listed several reasons for purchase of ASFA discs including heavy usage of print and online versions (PM, JM), positive user response during the 30-day trial period (KH, PM, TM), and the interest of library administration in subsidizing end user searching (PB, MG). CW purchased the BIP disc because the cost of the printed tools and the time spent using the online version was within \$100 of the cost of the BIP disc.

*2) How were subscription and equipment costs funded? Were subscriptions to printed versions dropped?*

Initial disc and (in some cases) equipment funding were provided by library funds

(KH,CW), the Library Director's reserve fund (PM), library budget allocation for online services (JM), the Graduate Department (PB), or the supplies budget (MG). Ongoing subscription costs are coming from library funds (KH,CW,PM,PB), library budget allocation for online services (JM), or the supplies budget (MG).

Libraries did not drop print subscriptions after getting discs except for BOOKS IN PRINT PLUS (CW). The reasons given included the continued heavy usage of the printed version due to the one-person limitation of disc searching (PM), the lack of public access within the library to the discs (JM), and the uncertain future of compact disc technology and the ASFA product (PB). Two libraries (MG,TM) had already dropped subscriptions to print versions in unrelated actions.

JS commented that since ASFA is updated semiannually, the printed and online versions offer greater currency. Cambridge needs a critical mass of ASFA subscribers in order to provide quarterly updates as originally planned. Cambridge is now offering a 10% discount to new ASFA disc subscribers for each subscription to a printed Cambridge abstracting journal.

Several panelists reported that the discs are leased and not purchased. Panelists commented that leasing is disadvantageous for those libraries that distribute outdated copies to sister libraries (CW), that the "lease" nature of the purchase was not made clear at the time of purchase (PM), that leasing is problematic for some institutions (TM), and that leasing was not a problem since continuation is the intent (PM). JM commented that lease cancellation requires the return of the discs. Purchased information would have to be returned which is a different situation than with print subscriptions. JS commented that Cambridge's discs can now be purchased for an additional charge.

Most panelists purchased microcomputers for the discs; some panelists reported using existing microcomputers. Some panelists purchased disc players outright (CW,TM); most are lease-purchasing a disc player from Cambridge. MG utilized special equipment-leasing funds within the institution.

MG and KH reported delays in receiving ASFA discs; MG reported a delay in receiving the disc player. MG reported extensive communication difficulties with Cambridge.

### *3) Equipment configuration and location?*

Libraries reported a variety of equipment being used. Libraries are using IBM XT or AT or compatible microcomputers. Printers in usage include Epson (KH,PM,JM,TM), NEC Spinwriter (CW), laser printer (MG), and Hewlett Packard Thinkjet (PB). Monochrome and color monitors are being used. Most libraries are using Philips disc players; CW is using Hitachi for BIP disc. CW reported being unable to run ASFA on a Hitachi player; JS commented that ASFA has different software versions for Philips and Hitachi players. An OCLC M300 microcomputer was being used by JM; it lacked enough

expansion slots to accommodate a disc player card, a memory card, and a hard disc drive card. JS commented that ASFA needs 512K memory.

Libraries had equipment located in public areas (KH,PM,PB) and staff areas (CW, JM,MG). MG is planning local area network access to the equipment located in a staff area. Provisions for equipment security included nothing, location in highly visible public area or controlled staff area, and equipment placement within an enclosing cabinet/desk which the staff closes when they leave the library (KH,PM).

The strategies reported for handling multidisc databases included staff changing discs (TM), remote location of the disc player with staff changing discs (PM,TM), and checkout of the discs from the circulation desk with the public changing discs (PB).

#### *4) Usage of the discs?*

Some libraries reported open access to anyone and some reported restricted access. No library recharged searchers for usage. Some queueing problems were reported (KH,PM,TM,JM); CW and JM reported queueing problems because the discs are accessible via a staff microcomputer.

#### *5) Comments regarding search software and documentation?*

ASFA: The panel differed in their opinion of the search software and the vendor-supplied documentation.

KH commented that the software was good, that it needed better word adjacency possibilities, and that there was a format bug. The documentation is adequate for the experienced searcher but could be clearer for the novice searcher (e.g. explanation of fields and descriptors).

CW commented that the software was not easy to use and that the documentation was inadequate, being written for the MEDLINE database.

PM commented that the software was flexible and had good searching capabilities; it is not user-friendly but at least is not hostile. Its usage is not intuitively obvious but it is usable after a brief introduction. Documentation is adequate but too long; users will not read more than two pages.

JM commented that the documentation is inadequate and poorly organized and that the menu-driven search software could be improved.

PB commented that the software is generally good. A manual was developed because vendor documentation was deemed inadequate. Introductory screens were designed to display information prior to entering the search software; these screens state what the discs cover and that the software has two search modes. The searcher may also access instructional screens. Context-sensitive or fragmented online help needs to be developed;

currently the searcher is forced to refer to a long search manual either online or in paper wherein is buried the small bit of information that the searcher needs. Unfortunately the searcher must exit the search software in order to change from one ASFA disc to another; the search session is suspended while the software reloads.

MG commented that the software was very good especially in its dual mode design for inexperienced and experienced searchers. The documentation was very good and not too long compared to the usual computer documentation. Unfortunately the ASFA classification numbers on disc are undocumented. MG reported that a chapter author can be searched but cannot be displayed as part of the citation; instead, the book editor is displayed.

TM commented that author searching was problematic and that ASFA records can have editorial quality problems. Compact disc search software needs to be standardized (e.g. standardized screen designs, search protocols and formats) even if it is at the expense of software development.

JS commented that the new version (2.0d) of the search software corrected some of the problems (author searching and format) noted by some panelists who do not appear to have the new version. PB commented that author searching did change with the new version; MG commented that the new version still does not display chapter authors. JS reviewed the new features of the new version (2.0d) of the search software.

**BOOKS IN PRINT PLUS:** CW commented that the software is excellent and easy to use. It is menu-driven but it moves quickly. The documentation is adequate for most searching needs.

*6) Comments regarding update frequency?*

PB commented that ASFA recently changed its update schedule from quarterly to semiannual. Most panelists expressed a desire for quarterly updates. JS commented that currency could be addressed in the future by the development of floppy disc updates or linkage of the disc system to the online version.

*7) Comments regarding user education?*

Libraries publicized ASFA by various means: school newsletter (KH,PM,PB), electronic newsletter (JM,MG), library newsletter (PB), and mailings to academics (PM) and students (PB). Some libraries offered formal user instruction (PM,TM) or introductory demonstrations (MG,TM). Some libraries had developed handouts or manuals (PM,PB). Some libraries display the ASFA Thesaurus (KH,PM,PB) and geographic codes (PM,PB) next to the equipment.

*8) Comments regarding evaluation & staffing?*

**KH reported that ASFA users were very satisfied. User assistance does impact daily**

workload; however the users become accustomed to searching and the demand lessens for staff time. No impact on online searching or interlibrary loan requests was seen. Library users usually want items quickly and thus do not submit interlibrary loan requests for ASFA items that are not locally owned.

CW reported that BOOKS IN PRINT PLUS has made a definite impact. Acquisitions time is saved. Records are downloaded into a DBASE III file and incorporated into the acquisitions process. Review lists can be created for scientists and reading-level specific reading lists can be created for the public information office.

PM reported that ASFA discs are beneficial from users' perspective; they are easier to use than printed indexes and free compared to the online version. ASFA discs generated positive feelings for the library. Mediated search activity has increased but the increase may not be related to ASFA discs. Oftentimes followup online searches in other databases are executed after the user has searched ASFA. The online version of ASFA is still searched for library users who want the library to execute searches for them. After the startup period, ASFA discs are not making a significant impact on daily staff workload or interlibrary loan.

JM reported that the online version of ASFA is still accessed by the library. The online version's pre-1982 coverage is of interest to some library users and it is convenient to search the complete span of years in one step while online. JM anticipates an increase in interlibrary loan requests because library users are content to wait for delivery of items requested. Users are pleased with ASFA discs and appreciative of the library's effort in expanding service.

PB reported that user response has been positive. A time log is being recorded for each search session in order to analyze usage. ASFA discs have been helpful for responding to information requests from correspondence. There has been no change in online searching patterns. ASFA was rarely searched before the ASFA discs arrived; discipline-specific databases were usually searched and that continues to be the pattern. Cambridge is receiving revenue that it did not previously receive from online searching. ASFA discs have impacted staff workload but the effort is worth it for the benefit gained. Minimal impact has been noted on interlibrary loan requests; the interlibrary loan staff benefit when requesters include an ASFA printout with their requests.

MG reported that ASFA discs are a convenient preparation before going online. User response has been positive.

TM reported that compact disc technology is an important component of the library's plan for development. TM commented that studies have shown that there is a high level of user satisfaction with online searching regardless of the quality of the searches. Librarians have a responsibility to educate users and ensure quality searching.

JS commented that developing countries do not have access to online systems and response has been positive to ASFA discs.