

**CCL-EAR COMMITTEE REVIEW**  
**AP Images**  
**September 2008**

In September 2008, selected members of the Council of Chief Librarians, Electronic Access to Resources Committee (CCL-EAR) undertook a "hands-on" study of AP Images.

AP Images (formerly AP Multimedia Archive) is primarily a collection of photographs and other media content from the Associated Press news service, some dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In addition to the photographic collection, it includes audio clips, charts and graphs, audio files (from AP radio broadcasts) and advertising/PR photos. The database is offered to the library market through the Educational Division of AccuWeather.

Each reviewer independently, or in concert with other qualified professionals on their campus library staff, reviewed and evaluated AP Images. Though other faculty and/or staff may have helped in the review process, completion of the form was by the CCL-EAR committee member only and not transferred to another. Ratings were based upon the potential value of the service to the California Community Colleges as a whole and not solely on the needs of any specific campus.

**OVERALL ASSESSMENT 2.5, 2.5, 2.5**

Is the product suitable for community college students?

This was an especially challenging review to write because of conflicting descriptions of the database. The Associated Press web site gives one description of the database (<http://www.apimages.com>), while the AccuWeather site gives another (<http://ap.accuweather.com>). The product is referred to by at least 3 different titles, i.e. AP Images, AP Photo Archive, AP Multimedia Archive. The database seems to be evolving but still suffers from challenging interface issues and minimal online customer support. This is a database that is trying to appeal to more than one type of end user including news media, businesses, and government customers. The library market appears to be a fairly recent target market. Ironically, many of the images in the database can be found freely on the web although that type of access and use raises the usual copyright issues (which we all know are of little or no concern to our students). The vendor could benefit from increased input from front-line librarians, particularly on interface and metadata issues.

Two advantages to subscribing to this product would be the convenience of having a large database of images searchable and in one place, and the explicit legal rights to use them for educational purposes (however, see our note on Restrictive License Terms, below.) Despite its flaws, AP Images is a reasonably priced multimedia database that would satisfy the needs of many community college assignments. Hopefully the vendor

will continue to improve the product in the near term. Once the audio file enhancements are put into place and the text files are loaded, an update to this review would be useful.

Though the content in the AP Images database is visually stunning, and beautiful to browse through, we are not sure how much of the AP Images content would be useful in an educational setting. While instructors might be interested in using images or sound clips in their teaching, the prohibition on placing content on an open website might limit the usefulness of this product for those users.

For users who are visual learners or those with dyslexia or another print-processing problem, AP Images might be a useful source of content. The media that it focuses on (photos, charts, graphs, audio recordings) make it a useful resource for those users, or for instructors who practice multi-modal instruction.

In summary, the AP Images product is a work-in-progress. Usage statistics are not yet accessible online, though the vendor claims this will be available in November, 2008. The interface is still designed for AP's commercial customers rather than educational users. The license terms are very restrictive and not well-thought out for the educational market.

## **RANKINGS**

- #1 --- Not Recommended
- #2 --- Recommend with reservations as noted.
- #3 --- Recommended.
- #4 --- Outstanding offer and opportunity.

Following are the results of the CCL-EAR Committee's review. Unless otherwise indicated, all comments are for AP Images only.

The following attributes were examined and rated:

- #1 - - - Poor
- #2 - - - Needs Improvement
- #3 - - - Good
- #4 - - - Excellent

## **INFORMATION DATABASE 2.5, 2.5, 2.5**

Consider functionality, appropriateness of format, database content, adequacy of coverage (retrospective, current), and value to the California Community Colleges as a whole.

The subject matter of the database is primarily news, reflecting the mission of Associated Press. The AP Images database has four basic types of content represented by tabs on the main search page: 1) Photographs – over 3.5 million photographic images from the 1820s to date. With constant updating, images can be as recent as one hour ago; 2)

Publicity – over 25,000 business and public relations photos including company logos, ads, etc.; 3) Audio – over 800,000 audio clips dating back to the 1920s to 48 hours ago; 4) Graphics – over 100,000 graphic images from 200- to date including maps, timelines, graphs, etc. There is an additional tab for historical images but they are also included in the “Images” file. More detailed information on each is given below.

## **Images**

The numbers here can be a bit deceiving when one factors in that, in some cases, there are multiple images of essentially the same event, person, etc. On one recent day there were 110 images of the Obama campaign. Images are in jpeg format and the quality is quite good at small sizes (images are 200-300 dpi at 8x10 size, file sizes are 800Kb-3MB). Each image includes a caption with photographer credit, and additional metadata including location, creation date, submit date, names of persons pictured, and category. The images are assigned any of the following four categories: Sports, International News, U.S. Domestic News, or Financial News. Images can be downloaded or printed. A downloaded image includes only the image while a print includes all of the attached metadata.

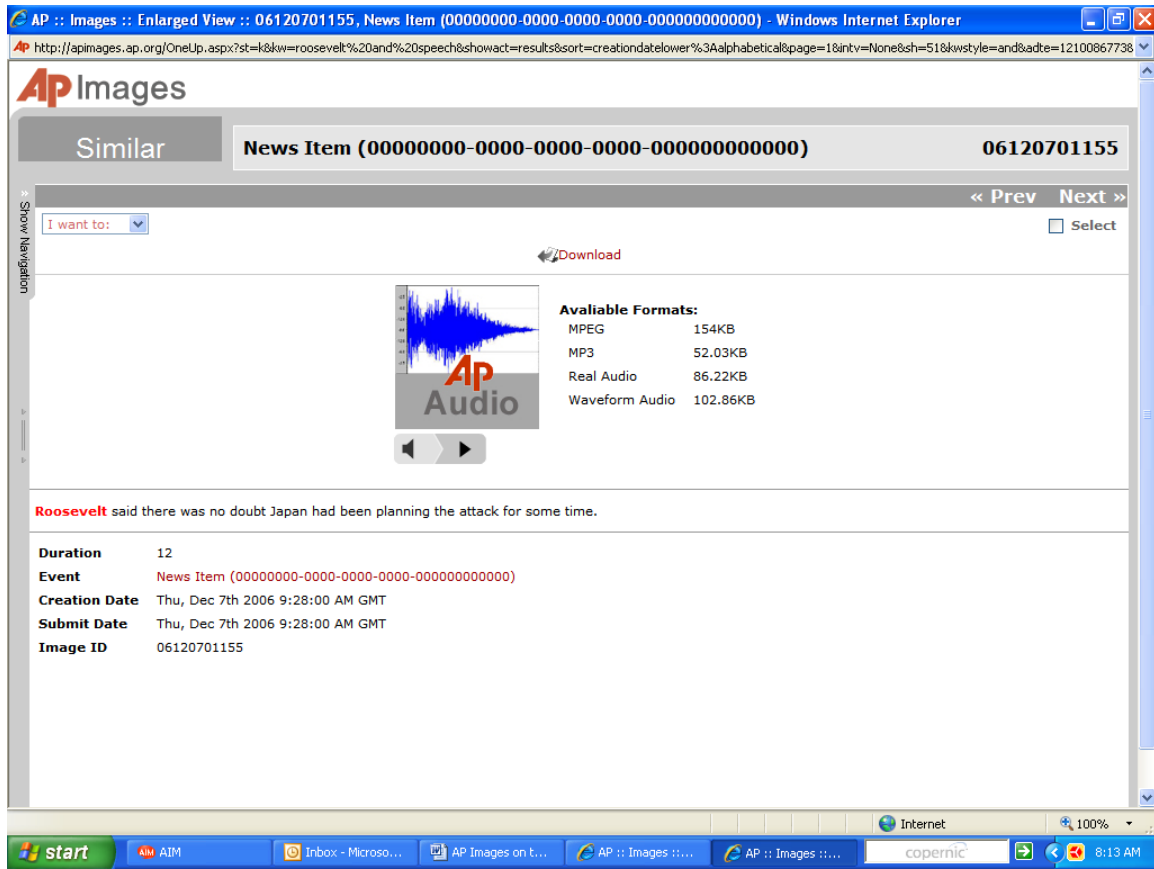
## **Publicity**

There is no overlap between these images and those in the “Images” file. This collection of public relations and business resources would be useful for business and marketing assignments or for some vocational programs such as food service or travel agent studies. Images include company logos, marketing campaigns, travel destinations, food trends, etc. Oddly enough, these images do have a keyword field in the attached metadata, unlike some of those in the “Images” file.

## **Audio clips**

The vendor claims over 800,000 “sound bites” are included in the database. Once again, the numbers can be deceiving. Some of the audio files are as short as two seconds. A search on speeches of Martin Luther King Jr. yielded a two-second clip of Reverend King saying “I have a dream”. More descriptive information will be accompanying the individual clips in the coming months.” Hopefully, that content will include more than the example of an audio file given below. The date of the actual speech would be much more useful than the date it was added to the database.

There are some problems with the audio clips, many have the same title and differ only in their AP-assigned ID number. The user has no way of differentiating the many clips with the same title. For example, there are 14 audio clips entitled “Subway derailing” each dated 5-5-08. There are 128 audio clips titled “olympic torch” but each has different content.



## Graphics

One of the strengths of this database is the Graphics content. This is an excellent source of statistical information and for those students needing a visual aid to support a speech or issues paper. Once again, however, numbers are not what they seem. A search on “Smoking” called up four images of the same chart.

## Text

This fifth category of information will include over 1.5 million Associated Press news articles and briefs from 1997 to 48 hours ago. As of September 2008, there are approximately 10,500 articles available. However, the AP news content is also available online at no charge from many other sources, such as Google News or newspaper websites.

## Restrictive License Terms

Users have permission to use the AP Images content in “printed copies of text and images for book reports, term papers, theses, class handouts and research, and; Power Point type presentations, overhead projection, slide shows, and other similar multimedia presentations whose usage is confined to the licensed institution.” Users are not allowed to use the content in any newspapers, magazines, brochures or for any commercial purpose. Users are not allowed to place any of the AP Images content on an open web

page, per a conversation with the vendor this is allowed on a website that requires a logon. Still, this restriction may hinder use of the content in an educational setting. Also, users may not create derivative works from the AP Images content. This may hinder its use by Art or Graphics Design students.

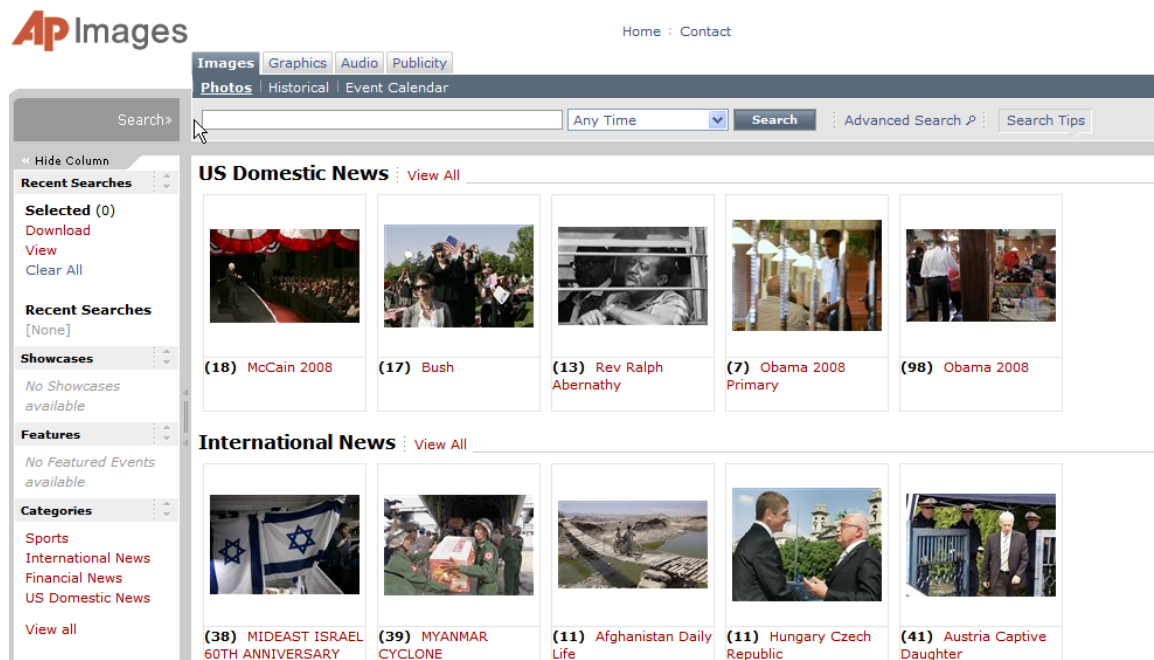
Users are also appear to be bound by the License Terms and Terms of Use on the main page of the AP Images website, which in Section 2.1b states that “these License Terms shall cover all rights, obligations, terms and conditions not expressly addressed in such Content-Specific Restrictions, License Agreement or Invoice.” Additional restrictions in the License Terms forbid users from modifying or even rotating the images (Section 3.1) and users are required to include the AP-supplied caption, the AP credit and a copyright notice for each image used (Section 3.2 c, d and e.) Students and faculty may find themselves unwittingly violating AP’s license terms if they do not closely read and follow the license agreements and terms of use for the website. From a conversation with a vendor sales rep, it is not clear whether the website Terms of Use document applies to educational users.

It seems that AP has not thought about the needs of the educational market, and is simply applying the same license terms that it uses for its commercial customers.

## SEARCH INTERFACE 2, 2, 2

Consider the functionality and ease of use of the interface. Is it intuitive or is an excessive amount of training required? Are any crucial features missing from the search interface?

The page below represents the default search page with comments to follow:



The opening search page includes a collection of thumbnail images of the most recent photos in the four categories (i.e. US Domestic News, International News, Financial

News, and Sports). Images, Graphics, Audio, and Publicity must all be searched separately. The date parameters are: Any Time, From Today, Last Hour, Last 24 Hours, Last 36 Hours, Previous 7 Days, Previous 14 Days, Previous 30 Days, and Previous Year.

The user has the option to customize displays to include full view (with all metadata) and number of images per page. Search history is tracked on the left column. “Showcases” and “Featured Events” are described as: image collections or events “...that AP Editorial staff defined as noteworthy”. Their inclusion on any given day is erratic. One nice feature is the ability to make custom slide shows by selecting slides from the thumbnail view and displaying the series of slides in full-screen mode.

The Advanced Search feature allows searching by several different fields but many of them would be useless to or ignored by our students. The “Select a field” options include such mysterious choices as Hue, NegNumber, Routing, Sig In, Sig Out, Transref, Slug, SpclFieldAttn, and SID In. These would seem to be search criteria that are used by AP itself, revealing this database’s dual-use purpose as AP’s own image access system. Perhaps these are well-known to journalists but our students would be thoroughly confused. These make the advanced search screen more confusing than it need be and reducing its usefulness for community college users.

The screenshot shows the 'Advanced Search' window with a 'Close' button in the top right. The interface includes the following elements:

- Search Terms:** A text input field with radio buttons for 'all' (selected) and 'any'.
- Arrived Within:** A dropdown menu set to 'Last 36 Hours'.
- Created Between:** Two date selection fields separated by a comma.
- Category:** A dropdown menu set to 'US Domestic News'.
- Media Type:** A dropdown menu set to 'Images: Photos'.
- Sort:** A dropdown menu set to 'Recently Added'.
- People:** A text input field.
- Event:** A text input field.
- Group:** A checkbox.
- Source:** A text input field.
- Photographer:** A text input field.
- Image IDs:** A text input field.
- City, State:** Two text input fields separated by a comma.
- Orientation:** Radio buttons for 'Either' (selected), 'Vertical', and 'Horizontal'.
- Country:** A text input field.
- Color:** Radio buttons for 'Either' (selected), 'Color', and 'B/W'.
- Select a field:** A dropdown menu with a text input field next to it.
- Buttons:** 'Reset', 'Clear', 'Search', and 'Cancel' buttons at the bottom right.

## USER SUPPORT SERVICES 2, 2, 2

What types of customer and technical support are available for end users and library administrators?

Help screens and user support on the product itself are practically non-existent. The following is the only search assistance offered under the “Search Tips” button:

**Basic search:**

- ⋮ Enter keywords or sentences.
- ⋮ Use " double quotes " to search phrases.
- ⋮ Group keywords ( within parenthesis ).

**Narrow your search:**

- ⋮ Use **AND, OR** and **NOT** between keywords
- ⋮ Add **ALL** or **ANY** after keyword(s)
- ⋮ Add **datedwithin** <any number> <hours, days, weeks, months, years> after keyword(s) to limit date range.  
[example: sports and **datedwithin 6hours**]

A separate user guide can be found at: <http://apimages.accuweather.com>. Why this is not available on the product website itself is unclear. This site also lists contact information for technical support by email or phone but gives no hours of service. Free webinars can be arranged but onsite training is negotiated on a case-by-case basis.

Usage statistics are not available online at this time, but can be requested from the vendor. Vendor hopes to implement online usage statistics soon.

**COST 3, 3, 3**

If cost is available, does it seem reasonable in terms of comparable products?

This database is unlike others offered to libraries at this time. The cost is reasonable but it could be argued that many of these types of images are freely available via Google Images.

**AVAILABILITY/ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICE 3, 3, 3**

Is access/connection to product reliable and stable? Is response time adequate? Is product accessible to users with disabilities?

This reviewer had no problems accessing the database at various times during the day. Images are surprisingly fast to load considering that they are graphic files.

Full photo captions can be viewed by placing the cursor over the thumbnail image; a handy feature for any user.

Remote access is available via IP address, referring URL, and username and password.

**ADA/Section 508 Compliance**

Vendor states that “at this time, it doesn’t appear that AP Images is completely ADA compliant. AccuWeather is working with the Associated Press to identify specific changes that would need to be made in order to be completely Section 508 compliant.”

Reviewers examined the accessibility of the AP Image database using the following methods:

- keyboard only
- screen reader (JAWS)
- screen magnifier (ZoomText)

## **Observations**

### **Keyboard Only**

Some features of the database require the use of the mouse for operability.

Detailed image description/information that appears when using the mouse to hover the cursor over the image. (Note: A keyboard-only user would have to hit the Tab key multiple times in order to select an image of interest from the home page or do a search for a particular subject, then hit the Tab key multiple times in order to select the desired image, which then opens a separate window, where that description is also listed.)

Drop down menus with choices that appear when using the mouse to hover the cursor over Events, Featured Person, Person, Photographer, Keyword, etc.

Refine Search opens a separate window overlay with further options; however, if using only the keyboard, the focus remains on the currently navigated page. The focus moves to the fields in this window overlay only when using the mouse or hitting the Tab key for a very long time until it eventually comes to that section.

### **Screen reader**

Most of the issues for keyboard-only users will be the same for screen reader users. Since the information can not be readily accessed without using a mouse, screen reader users will have an extremely difficult time using this resource.

Another accessibility issue is the lack of alternative text for the images. Although the detailed description of each image is included in the Title attribute, there are no Alt attributes associated with the images. Mouse-users can hover over the images and see the detailed description of the image. However, when the screen reader came to an image, it read a long string of numbers and letters that probably corresponded to the file name. The link images for Download this item or Quick Save did not have appropriate alt text associated either. When the screen reader came to these links, it read "images/clear link graphic", which does not provide any clear indication of the function of the link. Screen reader users can obtain an organized list of all links on a web page. When this is done in the AP Image Database, there are a lot of occurrences of "images/clear" and listings like "84fe8fab82a34646a81ea4977eb81f60".

### **Screen magnifier**

Due to the nature of jpg images, the quality of the images on the site becomes degraded at higher levels of magnification. The detailed description of each image can be viewed

using the mouse, however at higher magnification levels, it becomes more difficult to smoothly pan the mouse cursor to read the information.

### **Other observations**

Since transcripts are not provided for the audio media, deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals will not be able to independently access those resources.

In general, this database seems to offer a lot of good resources. However, access to those resources for individuals with disabilities may be extremely difficult and limited.

### **Alternatives to AP Images**

Given the limited rights granted to subscribers by AP Images, users might consider whether they could instead use images found via Google Images (<http://images.google.com>) under the educational and fair use terms of copyright law (see Table 1.) In fact, Google Images often includes AP's own images in its content. Or, if rights-cleared-images are important, specifically the right to place content on an unrestricted website, users might consider using content from the Wikimedia Commons database ([http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Main\\_Page](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Main_Page)) a collection of almost 3 million freely usable media files (images, sound and video clips) Another source of copyright-free images is the U.S. government, there is a collection of photos and graphics, listed by federal agency at <http://www.usa.gov/Topics/Graphics.shtml>.

Table 1: Search results comparison, Google vs. AP Images (April, 2008)

<b>Search Terms</b>	<b>Google Images</b>	<b>AP Images</b>
Barack Obama	1,410,000	9,114
Olympic torch	218,000	3,120
Zimbabwe elections	89,400	1,474
Iraq war	2,910,000	21,141

### **OTHER REVIEWS OF THIS PRODUCT**

None found.