

**Selected Members of the CCL-EAR Committee
Review of EBSCO's *Premier* Database Package
January 2004**

During the fall 2003, selected members of the California Council of Chief Librarians, Electronic Access and Resources Committee (CCL-EAR) undertook a "hands-on" review of the EBSCOhost *Premier* Database Package (PDP). This product is EBSCO's most comprehensive multi-disciplinary journal database with nearly 4,000 titles available in full text of which nearly 78% are peer reviewed.

REVIEW PROCESS

Selected members of the CCL-EAR Committee, independently or in concert with *other* qualified professionals on their campus library staffs, reviewed and evaluated EBSCO's *Premier* Database Package. Assessments were submitted on a Review Reply Form specifically designed by the Committee for this purpose. Though other staff may have helped in the review process, completion of the form was by the CCL-EAR committee member(s) only and not transferred to others. Ratings were based upon the potential value of the proposal to the California Community Colleges as a whole and not solely on the needs of any specific campus.

Attributes of the information resource were assessed on a scale of 1 to 4 with 1 representing the "least value" and 4 representing the "most value". The following attributes were examined:

INFORMATION DATABASE

Consider its functionality, the appropriateness of format (bibliographic/full-text), the content of the information, the adequacy of coverage (retrospective, current), and its value to the California Community Colleges as a whole.

SEARCH INTERFACE

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?

USER SUPPORT SERVICES

If documentation is required for successful use of product, is it available, comprehensive, and well written? Is online help adequate and user friendly? Does vendor supply training if it is needed? Is a telephone help line available?

COST

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

ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICE

Is access/connection to product reliable and stable? Is response time adequate?

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

#1 ---- No Support

#2 ---- No Support at this time. Future support conditional upon enhancements noted below in Comments Section.

#3 ---- Support and Recommend proposal be forwarded to California Community College libraries for their acceptance or rejection. Would like to see enhancements in product noted below in Comments Section.

#4 ---- Outstanding offer and opportunity. Recommend proposal be forwarded to California Community College campus libraries or their acceptance or rejection.

Following are the results of the CCL-EAR Committee's review as well as comments taken from the individual Review Reply Forms.

The sub-committee rated the following elements using a scale in which a 4 is excellent and 1 is poor: Information Database; Search Interface; User Support Services; Cost; Accessibility of Service; and Overall. The Premier Database package received an overall 3.5 rating and none of the elements were rated at less than 3.

INFORMATION DATABASE

With the Premier Database Package, EBSCO has put together a bundle its products that addresses nearly every area of community college curriculum. Nearly 6,537 full text titles, of which over 75% are peer-reviewed, cover business, education, psychology, religion, philosophy, health, and vocational areas. In addition, PDP contains 82,019 full text biographies, 504 country economic reports, 7 education reports, 46 health reports, and 106 industry reports. It includes and Image Collection that contains 107,035 photographs, maps, and flags.

The PDP includes Academic Search Premier; Business Source Premier; MasterFILE Premier; Health Source: Nursing/Academic Edition; Health Source: Consumer Edition; Psychology & Behavioral Sciences Collection; Religion & Philosophy Collection; Vocational & Career Collection; Military & Government Collection; Professional Development Collection; and Newspaper Source. Though PDP does not contain the full text of ERIC or MEDLINE, it does provide access to the records for these resources through its search interface.

Of the 6,537 full text journals, over 2,100 have embargo periods ranging from 2 weeks to 36 months, with the majority falling in the 6 to 12 month range. However, the back file coverage continues to extend further into the past so that now several key publications contain full text back to 1975, and the *Harvard Business Review* has full text to 1922.

While the number of full text titles is impressive, the ratio of all titles to full text titles is nearly 50%. This may pose an impediment at worst or an inconvenience at least for community college researchers.

The emphasis on peer-reviewed journals may make this product less appealing to community college libraries where the research demands may not require such rigorous sources.

SEARCH INTERFACE

The PDP search interface is very clean and intuitive to use. The navigation bar is nicely designed. A help button is available with simple instructions and sample searches. Advanced searching is offered for power searchers to limit retrieval to very specific criteria. Users are able to do a single broadcast search over multiple EBSCO databases and retrieve a single result list.

While combining more than one database in a single search enables the system to provide links from citation-only retrievals in one database to full text, if available, in another database, it also reduces the functionality of individual databases. Search options, such as "browse indexes," that are available in a specific database are not available in a combined search. Another quirk of combined searching is that the total number of hits changes as you work through the results list. This is because the original number of hits includes duplicate citations that are "de-duped" as you click through the list.

EBSCO continues to update and improve its products. The PDP includes more PDF file format than before, much of it "native PDF" that is searchable. The "MyEBSCOhost" is a new feature that allows users to save search results across sessions, save search queries, create journal alerts, and set up automatic searches with results emailed to the user on a regular schedule.

EBSCO's "Local Administrator" feature is very easy to use and allows libraries to do a considerable amount of customization and branding. Administrators can change search defaults, decide what limiters and expanders to include, run statistical reports, and add links to OPACs and other sources of information.

There is always room for improvement. For the PDP, areas for improvement identified by reviewers include: developing a means for the user to sort results at the search results page by peer reviewed journal, magazine, or newspaper; creating an easy way to select all databases on the "Choose Database" screen; and simplifying the means to restrict results to only full text from the "Results List" without having to go back to the search screen and run the search again.

USER SUPPORT SERVICES

User support services are adequate.

Online help is available from a menu at the top of each page, and includes easy-to-follow instructions on searching, viewing, saving, printing, and contacting technical support. Help is not context sensitive, but a link labeled "database help" gives database-specific examples of explanations.

Title lists, subject indexes, ready-to-print training forms and handouts, and online tutorials are available to support student, faculty, and librarian use. EBSCO maintains a separate webpage for support at <http://support.epnet.com> that offers tutorials, training materials and flash demos. EBSCO staff will make regular onsite visits to alert users to new features and modifications.

The online help section includes a section at the bottom of each page called "Where to send your comments." This section includes information on how to contact the technical support department, but does not include hours of operation.

COST

The Premier Package is priced at \$18,000. EBSCO guarantees the same price for the second year and a price increase cap at 3-5% in year 3. Given the depth and breadth of coverage, the interface improvements, and user enhancements, the price, while high, is quite reasonable.

ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICE

Overall, EBSCO distinguished itself with its consistent, reliable, speedy accessibility, and for the past few years has been addressing ADA compliance issues.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

The PDP is both comprehensive and affordable. It includes important full text databases that are very useful for community college libraries. The interface is easy to use and having 13 databases under one search interface, which also cross links among other databases, increases the value of this package. The cost during these budget times is another reason to consider this package.

Librarians concerned that the number of embargoed titles is high, may want to examine the title list. Content that is 6 to 12 months old may be better than no content at all. Many of the embargoed titles are at a scholarly or professional level, and may not affect community college researchers.

The dichotomy between the Academic Search Premier database, which is primarily peer reviewed journals, and MasterFile Premier, which has materials aimed at serving public library users, poses issues for community college libraries. Our needs seem to fall somewhere in the middle. Community college libraries need mostly full text resources that support the broad range of students we serve, and provide a better balance between scholarly and non-scholarly materials.

While the cost of the product is deemed appropriate and reasonable, PDP does not include the full text of important national newspapers. For libraries that opt to use PDP in lieu of a different journal database and 2 or 3 subject databases, the cost to maintain access to a national newspaper is an important consideration.