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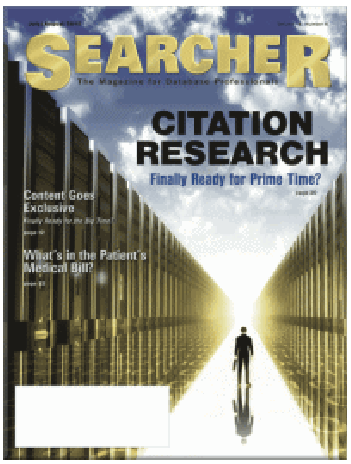

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Content Goes Exclusive

An Ever-Changing Coral Reef

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Content Goes Exclusive

An Ever-Changing Coral Reef

When it first began, I tried to convince myself that it was no big deal. Several years ago, when LexisNexis informed its users that it would no longer offer access to Bloomberg News, I accepted the decision since Bloomberg News is a product created by Bloomberg LP. Similar to Dow Jones with *The Wall Street Journal*, Dow Jones Newswire, and Barron's — they create it, they own it, they can distribute it how they like, right? As an information professional at an economic consulting firm, I made the decision to substitute Reuters and Dow Jones for Bloomberg News and to direct insistent requestors to our stand-alone Bloomberg terminal.

by Amy L. Affelt
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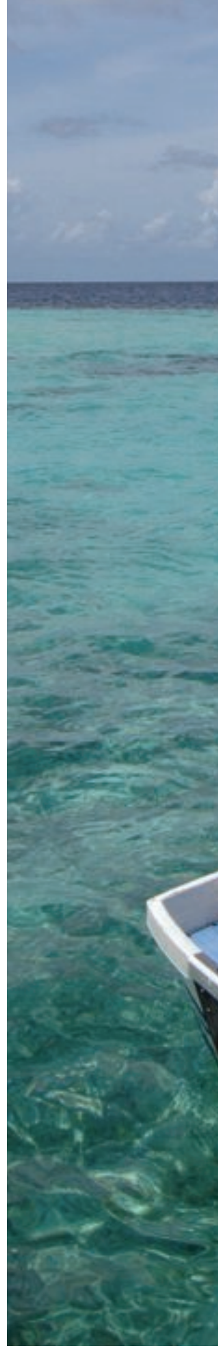
COMPASS LEXECON

Some years went by and I didn't notice any other publishers following suit. Then all of a sudden in 2006, The Financial Times (FT) announced a similar move with a bold twist: The company would still provide its content through third-party databases such as Factiva and LexisNexis, but users would have to buy a site license from the FT in order to continue to receive the content. This decision by the FT made me stand up and take notice. I sensed that this was no one-off development but a symptom of a larger movement taking place. Further, this is not a publication with an easy substitute. This is especially evident to business and finance firm information centers which offer customized news alerts. For example, each morning before I begin my "real" workday, I deliver packages of breaking news on companies, industries, and topics of interest to individuals at my firm. I run these searches through the sources considered as the "Big Four" — *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *Financial Times*, and *The Economist*. I would be extremely negligent if I changed the source list to the "Big Three" due to a contract dispute. As a result, in order to remain competitive, consulting firms, i-banks, law firms, and others have no choice but to contract with the FT.

When exclusive licensing agreements are made, information professionals are usually aware of the developments even before they are formally announced. During the American Library Association Midwinter Meeting in January 2010, attendees were abuzz with the unofficial news that EBSCO had signed exclusive licensing agreements with Time, Inc. and Forbes. Discussion quickly populated the library community blogosphere, with librarians without EBSCO subscriptions expressing concern that they would lose access to the publications from these companies. Gale Cengage directly addressed those concerns, issuing a stern "open letter to the library community" [http://www.gale.cengage.com/fairaccess], in which it characterized the practice of exclusive content licensing as "a practice that drives up costs while limiting access to information," and termed this practice



"fundamentally wrong." It began a Facebook Group, Librarians for Fair Access to Content, started Tweeting, and also hosted a booth on the subject at the Public Library Association meeting in Portland, Ore., in March. Gale Cengage also offered a suggestion to librarians: "Don't reward this behavior." EBSCO responded in kind, with a lengthy letter whose key takeaway centered around its main justification for entering into exclusive licensing arrangements: "ensuring that our customers do not lose access to the most important titles in databases" [http://www.ebscohost.com/special/temp01-2010/EP-Response-to-Gale.pdf].

Reaction from other content aggregators has trickled in slowly. Dow Jones Factiva informed its customers in early April that the publications would be gone on April 30, 2010, while ProQuest commented that "most of the titles are freely available on the Web." ProQuest also generalized that the costs of "general interest content" such as the publications from Time and Forbes would be so high that their customers would not be willing to pay for that content (1).

It is troubling that this is the spin being given to information professionals regarding this development. First, these publications do not have a free archive on the internet that would afford the type of precise, archival searching that many information professionals need to conduct. Such a perspective seems to run counter to the information industry's interests. If content charged for by information industry vendors has been free all along on the internet, what else are they charging for that is free on the internet? While this dismissal can sound insulting, information professionals know that this statement is untrue. However, if an organization's senior management, not working in information services but rather in budget and finance, reads such a quote, it only serves to reinforce the notion that "everything is free on the internet," that they do not need fee-based databases, and perhaps, ultimately, that they do not need information professionals.

Additionally, for information professionals working in business, finance, law, and many other disciplines, titles such as *Forbes*, *Fortune*, *Time*, and the *Harvard Business Review* are not "general interest" publications. They are in essence trade press for the world of business. For example, there is simply no substitute for case studies from the *Harvard Business Review*. *Harvard Business Review* is the gold standard in business case studies and the go-to source for any information practitioner needing a real-life example to emphasize a point. The Fortune 500 and similar lists issued in that publication form the basis of business analysis of all types, from using the lists of companies to track overall stock market performance to looking for peer companies and competitors for industry comparisons, to formulating a benchmark for looking at the overall economic outlook of the country.

Information professionals cannot shrug off these publications as "nice to haves"; it would be irresponsible. For most corporate information centers, they are "must haves." The same is true for public and academic libraries. These publications are needed to conduct research at any level, from elementary school to the doctoral level. In the vast ocean of information, accurate, high-quality content is the coral reef — the lifeblood of every industry. This content is relied upon on a daily basis to enable critical decision making involving millions of dollars. The credibility and reputations, as well as the careers of librarians and information professionals, depend on a healthy, thriving, growing coral reef of content to enable us to do our jobs.

We're Going to Need a Bigger Boat

What to do? The question is more easily answered for information professionals. It is almost impossible to be unaware of these developments, as they dominate all of our industry publications. It is imperative that we note these agreements, explain the importance of these publications to the subscription decision makers in our organizations, and advocate strongly for contracts so that our organizations do not lose access. Similarly, information center managers must have strong training programs in place so that all practitioners know where to search to reach exclusive content. It is maddening and frustrating to lose access to content, but as professional searchers, as long as our organizations maintain the necessary subscriptions, our work product should remain unaffected. We must be vigilant in making sure we know where to go in order to get the content we need. Content is our daily bread and we must know where it is located and how to access it.

It is more difficult, however, if our organizations are financially or contractually unable to subscribe to a database with exclusive content. In these instances, we are faced with two choices: Either explain the reasoning behind the lack of subscription or offer alternatives. Even if the alternative publications are not a direct or equal substitution, our willingness to suggest additional options demonstrates our awareness of the issues and our dedication to providing on-point information. It

and more pervasive, further clouding the relationship between publishers and aggregators. When one enters the publication name and sees the list of aggregators along with the publisher's website, it can make one wonder why one would want to enter into a contractual database agreement with an aggregator for publications not needed all that often. These lists of full-text sources for individual publications inadvertently magnify the direct competition that exists between the publisher websites and the aggregators also selling access to specific publications.

A third choice is more of a desperation move than an option — you can try an internet archive such as the Wayback Machine [http://www.archive.org]. The Wayback Machine is the search engine from the Internet Archive, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded to build an internet library. The Internet Archive provides snapshots of websites at various points in time, so you just might find an old *BusinessWee*k or *Chicago Tribune* article by looking at the snapshots taken on various dates. The Wayback Machine is nuanced and twitchy, doesn't always reach inside the websites for formal publications, and can require the skills of a professional searcher when the content in question is not readily apparent. So the Internet Archive is not an adequate source for comprehensive and thorough searching. Rather, it is a resource to try if one needs a specific piece of content and key information where you know the publication name, date of article, and title or prominent keywords.

also presents an opportunity to lobby our stakeholders and champions to support acquiring the needed database.

To stay on top of availability, we can use a source such as *Fulltext Sources Online* [http://www.fso-online.com/home_login.cfm?sid=81761170]. In *Fulltext Sources Online*, you can search by publication name and generate a list of databases with full-text coverage of that source. The available dates are also listed. This source is most useful when you know the name of the publication from which you need an article, but it can also help when you need an article from a publication but do not subscribe to any of the databases with full-text coverage, as it lists publisher websites as well.

In the case of scholarly publications, most individual journal articles from publisher websites can be bought with a credit card as one-offs. This is easily accomplished and is becoming more

The Wild West Under the Sea

The above approaches usually only solve problems of finding archived material from the print versions of publications. Digital-only content is an entirely different matter and one reminiscent of the Old West. Content retention rules for web-exclusive publications are arbitrary, unclear, and often nonexistent. When librarians are asked for material that was once available but now no longer appears on a website, there is no clear path to follow to try to find the information. Some publisher websites maintain extensive archives; others are limited or unavailable. Some publishers add to their archives without deletion; others archive for a rolling period of time.

The future of the digital-only frontier is anyone's guess, as there is no code of conduct to encourage publishers to establish and maintain archives of website content. Therefore, we may have to begin to "archive ourselves," as bq suggests in her April 2010 "Searcher's Voice" editorial. Ironically, a few companies have seized on this opportunity. Evernote [http://www.evernote.com] and Springpad [http://springpadit.com] are services that claim to store "everything" and "anything," from voicemails and photos to webpage snapshots, emails, and documents. ICyte [http://www.icyte.com] focuses specifically on webpage content, employing cloud computing to store the snapshots on ICyte servers, enabling them to be retrieved at any time. This too is a bit convoluted, since if a service such as ICyte is used for corporate research archives, one then becomes dependent upon ICyte's maintenance of that archive. Will corporations agree to have their research archives stored in a cloud? What happens if these services close up shop? The old adage, "If you want something done right (or in this case, permanently and proprietarily), you have to do it yourself," seems to apply.

Throw Out the Lifeline

When there is a lack of awareness of content being moved or lost, two segments are most vulnerable — the end user's research process and their resulting work product. As information professionals, we assume responsibility for end-user subscriptions and training, but we need to be mindful that content access issues — the lifeblood of our work — are not nearly as important to end-user searchers. If we are not intimately involved with their research as well as our own, end users will have no way of knowing when content is lost or moved to an exclusive database. Therefore, they will not know that the searches they conduct may potentially miss content that they believed was searched.

The worst-case scenario is that they report zero results in a publication and miss something critical to a deal or client issue.

Information managers can implement a number of best practices to assist desktop users. Ideally, the corporation would have a system in place so that in order to receive a password for a database, the end user would have to undergo intensive training with the information professionals. This training should include a discussion of which publications are available on which databases, complete with documentation containing tables listing each database and the content it contains, along with "if-then" scenarios directing end users to the appropriate databases to use when conducting different types of searches. This system works well with new employees, but what about end users who have been searching for years? How do we best inform these users that content has been lost or moved?

First, the information center should use every opportunity to communicate changes. This would include flyers on desk chairs, posters around the office, email alerts, banner notifications in intranet sites, and possibly a warning with a tick box upon log-on in which a user would agree that he or she has been informed that a publication has been removed from a database. Information centers can partner with IT staff; one possible collaboration could be the distribution of handouts with content change alerts when staff are given new PCs. Brown-bag type sessions should be continually offered to disseminate new information. Attendance at these sessions can be encouraged by posting invitations that explain the situation in ways such as, "New changes have occurred that affect your research. Attend this session to learn how these changes will impact your work." By creating and publishing these communications and hosting and conducting these training sessions, the information center assumes an integral position in the provision and use of research tools.

Updated database guides and how-to sheets should be issued quarterly and/or as needed. These guides should be very pointed and exacting; i.e., "In order to search Barron's, use Dow Jones Factiva," and, "If you are looking for a case study, search *Harvard Business Review* on EBSCO." For firms that work in litigation, where thoroughness and accuracy are extremely important, an end-user research checklist with a headline such as, "Before you end your research, make sure you have conducted the following searches" would be very effective in ensuring key publications were not missed. We need to remember that what may seem obvious to us as professional searchers may be completely foreign to someone searching the same databases we do but whose work exists largely in a completely different field. An additional caveat, such as, "Are you unsatisfied with your search results? Does something seem to be incomplete or incorrect? Contact the library for expert search assistance," should appear on end-user guides.

Cast the Safety Net

Even with acute attention to detail and the best of intentions, situations will arise in which desktop users will not realize they are missing content from must-search publications. RSS feed subscriptions for end users are an additional safety net that can be put into place to make certain that content is not missed. Librarians should begin by providing information regarding the various available feed reader options and the advantages and disadvantages of each. They should then host training sessions in which they explain how RSS feeds work; discuss with end users which companies, industries, and issues that they need to track; identify key publications; and assist with subscribing to the relevant feeds. This assistance may involve subscribing to the feed for the end user to ensure that it is thorough and accurate. These training sessions and materials should also include information regarding the keyword news alerts that can be set up at publication websites, along with the caveat that the alerts are not 100% reliable but are an option when casting a wide net. By offering RSS feed and news alert subscription training, librarians help to establish themselves as the go-to experts for using new technologies to access content.

Rearranging Deck Chairs

When content is lost, we look to our database vendors for a life raft, but sometimes it can seem like they are just rearranging deck chairs on the *RMS Titanic*. Vendors must share our burden when they have had to remove content because a competitor won the exclusive license. Merely notifying subscribers that content has been lost is insufficient. We should expect vendors to help us in the transition period and ask them to commit to three points:

- Give as much advance notice as possible that they will be removing publications.
- Help with the creation and distribution of end-user documentation, as well as possibly instituting online warnings upon log-in.
- Help with document delivery of content from the removed publications.

Reporting on their failure to retain content and helping people find a victorious competitor's content may seem counterintuitive to good business practice. But maintaining long-term relationships with subscribers is in the vendor's best interest. Vendors should help with these issues in order to solidify current and future contracts and to show their loyalty to the long-term interests of their customers.

The lack of a subscription to a database with an exclusive license presents an opportunity for the information center to market itself and its services. Most of our constituents are not really interested in the rationale behind why they suddenly have lost access to a particular title. Instead of stating that an organization can no longer access a specific publication, the loss of that publication can become our gain if we instead seize the opportunity to turn the negative into a positive. We can issue marketing materials and email updates that state, "If you need to search Publication X, please contact the information center for assistance." This is especially true when a publication is moved to an expensive or somewhat obscure database. For example, *BusinessWeek* is now exclusive to Bloomberg, since Bloomberg bought that title in October 2009. Consequently, the directive "If you need a *BusinessWeek* article or search, please contact the Information Center" should be a best practice in the majority of corporations. We can then pursue an alternative method of retrieval or contract with a document delivery service. It is important that we reassure our constituents that they are not losing access to information. Instead, we should inform them that a different process must be used in order to obtain that information which will require the assistance of information professionals.

Dr. Toby Pearlstein spent more than 15 years as the director of global information services at Bain and Co. Pearlstein sees these end-user issues as ongoing training concerns rather than the direct result of exclusive content licensing agreements. She believes that a commitment to training and the necessity of informing end users of changes must be pervasive and constant and that it is the responsibility of the information professional to be vigilant in communicating these developments. At Bain, where Pearlstein worked with more than 2,000 end users, training was customized and both scheduled and offered on-demand. The majority of end users were generalists whose work was carried out across a wide variety of industries. Consultants beginning work on new cases were encouraged to seek out information resource training to gain a better understanding of industries in which key issues were taking place. This system enabled the information center to have an ongoing relationship with end users and therefore have multiple opportunities to communicate new information (2).

What effect will exclusive licensing agreements have on the future of content and the reputation of individual publications?

Exclusive content is a curious business model for publishers and aggregators. When taken offline, publications become less and less visible. How long after publications become exclusive to one database do people start not to notice, or, worse yet, not to care that they are missing? Some end users may never even become familiar with certain exclusively licensed content. For example, *BusinessWeek* may garner respect from Baby Boomers, but if recent college grads only know it as one of many sources on Bloomberg, or have never seen it in an on-campus search since Bloomberg doesn't have a very active presence in academe, will they even notice it and will it represent must-have content to them? It is quite a gamble for Bloomberg, as *BusinessWeek*'s losses were roughly $60 million last year (3). This business model is particularly risky for publishers. In a real-time world in which companies such as Google, YouTube, Hulu, etc., generate all revenues from advertising and placement that rely on visibility and recognition, end users may not see the value in information from a once highly regarded publication that is now exclusive to a system to which they either do not subscribe or do not use frequently. Not only are the lines between known publications and Google-generated result sources blurred, they are sometimes nonexistent.

With regard to contract negotiations, Pearlstein believes that these agreements will "force people to make choices." In the current economic climate, the Time/Forbes/EBSCO alliance may cause some information managers to question, "Do I really need that *Fortune* article?" While it is certainly true that in some environments, some basic content sources are seen as essential (Gartner reports at management consulting firms and *FT* at U.K. business consultancies, for example), exclusive licensing agreements force hard decisions, and the decision-making process involves a review of the importance of individual publications. It is very possible that contracts will become more transactional; firms may negotiate contracts for fewer passwords or for access by only certain office locations or practice groups. These circumstances offer opportunity for both information professionals and competing vendors. Again, the information center can position itself to be seen as the go-to department for exclusive content unavailable at some or all desktops. The center can also earn kudos for consideration of costs and budget reviews benefiting the firm's bottom line while ensuring access to information, even if access points become limited. The competing vendors, meanwhile, can help their customers in the transition, so that if content licensing negotiations open up again and they find themselves benefiting, they will have strong relationships already in place with potential customers/partners.

Cue the Music: (Theme From *Jaws*)

As with so many other workplace and career issues that surface during challenging economic times, unique opportunities exist; we just need to look harder for them. As Jon Gordon analogized in *The Shark and the Goldfish*, we are not going to be fed, so we need to look for food (4). The opportunities are there for information professionals, we just need to be open to seeing them, and we need to make sure that we use them to our advantage. The only constant is change, and our ocean will look different in the future. But as always, information professionals prove time and again that we are the friendly goldfish who share the coral reef with the sharks.

One last note. As we went to press, an announcement appeared that Time, Inc. removed all its content from LexisNexis as of June 1. Here we go again. ◆

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