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**H.W. Wilson**

Twelve Point Plan  
For Quantitative and Qualitative  
Evaluation of Databases

■  
**Information Today, Inc.**

Productivity Tools

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# Twelve Point Plan

## For Quantitative and Qualitative Evaluation of Databases

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The assessment of a database's value to your library is not a simple matter. A thorough evaluation must account for many variables in order to arrive at a true measure of database value. Many vendors promote a simplified quantitative approach: calculate the cost per full text title and find out who gives you more full text titles for your money. Simple enough, but a bit too simple. There is much more to factor into the equation. We wouldn't choose our print reference purchases on a "cost-per-page" basis, so why should the database purchase be reduced to such a simplistic calculation? The quality of the library patron's user experience and the number of truly relevant results retrieved must weigh significantly in any evaluation of database value to a library.

### **Twelve points to consider:**

#### **Quality of Content**

Quality of content must enter the calculation of database value.

Ask how are journals selected for inclusion in the database. Are journals selected by recommendation from a panel of subject experts and experienced librarians, or is there an "include everything but the kitchen sink" approach to create inflated full text numbers?

Peer-review numbers can be deceiving. Look for a database vendor that sets an

unimpeachable standard when deciding which publications qualify to be designated as peer-reviewed. The database publisher should guarantee that the peer-review label means literally that an independent scholar has reviewed and recommended the article for publication. Peer-review must not be applied simply to any journal that is not a popular or trade title.

#### **Titles Appropriate to Database Subject**

Are the titles selected for inclusion in the database really relevant to the subject area? The presence of extra titles in a full text list does not provide a better user experience, rather it will tend to provide the highly unsatisfactory user experience of searching for journal articles and receiving a results set filled with inappropriate articles or even government produced pamphlets masquerading as full-text journals. Ask yourself if your library patron will be satisfied when a search of what is advertised as a complete education resource brings back articles from the likes of *National Tax Journal*, or *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying*.

#### **Controlled Vocabulary**

Is there a controlled vocabulary based on the literary warrant of the actual collection of items in the database, or has a database aggregator simply adapted a "one-size-fits-all"

vocabulary specific to nothing and of little true value in bringing users all of the available items on a topic?

#### **Relevance Ranking That Works**

Is there a relevancy ranking option available, and does the relevance-ranking algorithm understand that words found in fields like subject and abstract are more indicative of the "aboutness" of an article than random occurrences elsewhere in the article?

#### **Search and System Efficiency**

Does the database require executing a second search in order to sort the articles by relevance? This provides impressive usage statistics that make the database appear to be your most popular database, but does your patron really want to execute two searches when one could bring the best results? Ask yourself if those impressive statistics are truly a measure of database value, or more likely an indication of database inefficiency.

#### **Ease of Access to Best Results**

Does the database give library patrons quick and easy access to the information that they seek whether they are novice searchers or experienced professionals? Does the results set come back sorted only by date of publication in reverse chronological order, or



Quantitative analysis is one tool that may prove useful in making a determination of true database value to your library, but a qualitative evaluation should be the paramount concern.

are they sorted with the goal of giving users the best articles available, automatically placed at the top of the results set in one search? Don't ask your patrons to sift through hundreds of irrelevant articles that just happen to mention the terms sought. Look for a system that brings the articles truly about your patron's topic automatically to the top of the results set.

### Meaningful Access and Embargoes

Is the cost per full text title really what it claims to be? Try this comparison: remove all titles with a one-year or greater embargo period from each database journal list under consideration and then calculate the cost per full text title.

Is a database boasting over 4,000 full text titles, but with over 2,000 of them unavailable until a year or more after publication, due to lengthy embargo periods really more valuable than a database with over 2,000 full text titles with few significant embargoes?

### Accurate Full Text Numbers

Do the numbers really tell the truth? Note whether all of the titles in your periodical database are really journals. Journal full text

title lists may be larded with hundreds of "free to anyone" government pamphlets included simply to pump up the full text title counts.

### Statistics Tell Only Part of the Story

Consider how statistics are generated by your search system. Must the user re-execute a search to refine it? Do routine search result

manipulations generate new searches? Beware of relying solely on usage statistics to evaluate the value of a database.

### Truth in Packaging

Are all of the journals really there? Journals must be included in the title list only when there is actual content in the database. Watch out for a notation that reads: "\*indicates that this publication was recently added to the database and therefore few or no articles are currently available." You are paying for a title that isn't there.

### Most Efficient Searching

See if there is a way to manipulate the patron's results set right from the results screen so as to limit that set of results only to peer-reviewed journals, full text HTML or PDF page image. In many databases, the user must the user go back and adjust the parameters of the original search and then execute yet another search to get desired results.

### Know Your Source

Who is responsible for the metadata? Do highly trained subject specialists do the

indexing work in-house, or is it outsourced to "who-knows"?

You have a right to know the qualifications of those creating the metadata. Ask the name and qualifications of the editor.

Ask about the training of the indexing staff. Creating high-quality indexing based on high-quality subjects drawn from a superior quality subject vocabulary takes time to master. Indexers should be subject to rigorous training measured in months, not days. Training staff should also be drawn from the elite of the in-house indexing staff who are experienced with the subject vocabulary. Consistency in applying the correct subject headings requires experience and familiarity with the vocabulary and the standards of the company.

**Choose experience here- there's no substitute for it.**

Quantitative analysis is one tool that may prove useful in making a determination of true database value to your library, but a qualitative evaluation should be the paramount concern. The key question to ask is, which databases will bring your patrons the articles that they seek, containing the information required to answer their information needs quickly, easily and efficiently?

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# Productivity Tools

*The web doesn't just provide content, it can also provide working tools to help users become more productive and efficient with information.*

## Microsoft Maps-Live Search

<http://maps.live.com>

This site can find directions, businesses by category, and maps for areas. Easy-to-use and an all-in-one site for the SMB.

## TinyURL

<http://tinyurl.com>

Long URLs become manageable, tiny ones.

## Trip Advisor

<http://www.tripadvisor.com>

Helpful for planning business trips.

## Seat Selection

<http://www.seatguru.com>

If you travel a great deal and want to understand seat selection, airline travel rules, and other amenities, start here.

## Hot Spot Finder

<http://www.jiwire.com>

Find wireless connects for 150,000-plus hotspots in approximately 135 countries.

## Data Visualization

<http://www.smashingmagazine.com/2007/08/02/data-visualization-modern-approaches>

Smashing Magazine shows different ways to present data visually. Some powerful approaches to displaying information as visual images appear on this link.

## PanImages.com

<http://panimages.com>

When you want images but don't want to pay for them (or at least not much), try this site.

## Time Zones

<http://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock>

Time zones around the world.

## Weather

<http://www.weather.com>

Heads up on weather conditions hour by hour.

## Conference Calls

<http://www.budgetconferencing.com>

Set up a conference call quickly and cost-effectively from this site.

## Melissa's Lookups

<http://www.melissadata.com/lookups/index.htm>

This site allows you to look up a variety of information for free as long as you register. In addition, it offers sources for direct mailings and other products for a fee.

## Widgets/Gadgets

<http://widgets.yahoo.com>

The tag line of "Save Time. Waste Time. Have Fun!" sums it up. Find some useful gadgets here, but watch out that you don't end up wasting too much time looking for timesavers.

## Who Called Us

<http://whocalled.us>

This site logs calls from phone numbers that appear to be unknown. Sometimes you can find a company name.

## Google Search Tips

[http://www.googleguide.com/advanced\\_operators\\_reference.html](http://www.googleguide.com/advanced_operators_reference.html)

Everyone wants to search Google more productively.

## Google Usability

[http://www.usabilityviews.com/simply\\_google.htm](http://www.usabilityviews.com/simply_google.htm)

More links to make Google searching more productive and profitable.

## Travel.State.Gov

<http://travel.state.gov>

This site from the U.S. State Department gives good advice for those traveling internationally, e.g., passport information, danger zones, etc.

## LookSmart's Furl

<http://www.furl.net/home.jsp>

With this site the SMB can save a copy of any webpage with one click, share the webpage or mark it as private, and organize and store the information with tags the SMB creates. Additionally, this site allows the SMB to read and save other information "furl'd" by other users.

## Zotero

<http://www.zotero.org>

This site has some of the same elements as Furl but with a more academic feel. I use both: Furl for business sites that I save one at a time and Zotero when I do in-depth research. Zotero is a Firefox extension. "Zotero is an easy-to-use yet powerful research tool that helps you gather, organize, and analyze sources (citations, full texts, Web pages, images, and other objects), and lets you share the results of your research in a variety of ways."

## Computer-Friendly Sites

### Snagit

<http://www.techsmith.com/screen-capture.asp>

This site provides a low-cost yet easy way to capture information on a screen.

### PDF Creator

<http://sourceforge.net/projects/pdfcreator>

Download software here that can convert other document formats into PDFs.

### You Send It

<http://www.yousendit.com>

When you have a file larger than your email service can handle, try this site.

### DropSend

<http://www.dropsend.com>

Another site that can handle large files up to 1GB and store files too.

### Format Conversions

<http://docmorph.nlm.nih.gov/docmorph>

Fifty document conversiontools from the National Library of Medicine.

### File Extensions

<http://filext.com>

This site helps identify unknown file extensions.

### Transfer applications on a USB device or iPod

<http://www.mojopac.com/portal/content/products/index.jsp>

Mojopac has a free software download (currently 13MB) that allows you to transfer key software applications onto a USB device or iPod and run it on a host PC using Windows XP



Snagit



DropSend

with the look the SMB owner would have on his or her PC back home. Mojopac "transforms your iPod or USB Hard Drive or Flash drive into a portable and private PC."

### Iron Mountain

<http://www.ironmountain.com/digital/pc/backup.asp>

This company uses connected.com to automatically back up files on an SMB's PC for a fee.

### Carbonite

<http://www.carbonite.com>

This company will also automatically back up files on a PC for a low annual cost.

### Copyscape

<http://www.copyscape.com>

This site lets the SMB owner see if anyone has copied portions of its company website.

### Domain Tools

<http://whois.domaintools.com>

SMBs can use this site to keep updated on their website status and to make sure it does not expire.

### TrendMicro

<http://housecall.trendmicro.com>

This site can do some analysis of a user's computer to see if it has been infected by viruses, spyware, or other malware. There is information on donating to schools if the user wants to express his or her appreciation.

### Belarc

<http://www.belarc.com>

This site does a PC audit of hardware and software.

### ScanSafe

<http://www.scandoo.com>

This site rates the safety of websites.

### Open Office Suite

<http://www.openoffice.org>

This site offers a downloadable free office suite and includes desktop applications such as a word processor, spreadsheet, presentation manager, and drawing program.

### Zamzar

<http://www.zamzar.com>

This site helps when you need files converted. It has online conversions for documents, videos, music, and images plus other miscellaneous file extensions for free.

### StuffBak

<http://www.stuffbak.com/sb/default.aspx>

This site has information that can potentially help a business recover lost electronic assets and at a very low cost. I use it on my electronic devices.

### Inc Magazine

<http://technology.inc.com/internet/articles/200707/campbell.html>

In the technology section, you will find several sources of information for technology-related issues. For example, the link discusses 10 tips for choosing a domain name.

### Copernic Tracker

<http://www.copernic.com/en/products/tracker>

For a nominal fee, this site provides software to monitor changes of content on webpages that have a business interest. The "Web site tracking software can notify you by sending an email, including a copy of the Web page with the changes highlighted, or by displaying a desktop alert."

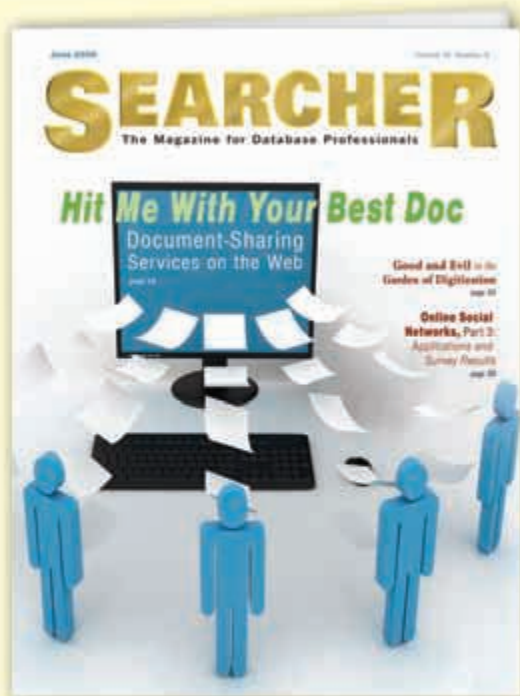
### University of Minnesota-Duluth

<http://www.d.umn.edu/itss/support/Training/Online/webdesign>

This site provides information and resources on web design.



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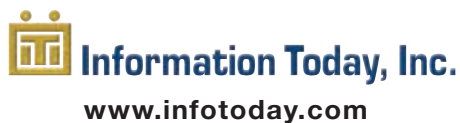
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