

Five Proven Ways to Increase Use of Paid Online Databases

Recent assessments of library services have revealed a strong, direct correlation between the set-up of Websites, pages and links and patrons' use of online databases. Based on the best practices of hundreds of libraries, the following five strategies for the effective set-up of Websites, pages and links are practical and easy to implement. As various metrics consistently prove, they significantly increase patrons' use of online databases, help libraries' maximize the return on their investments and justify renewals.



1. Create a dedicated online databases page and provide appropriate links to it. Your library home page's interface—and the library Website, in the case of remote access—should feature a prominent link to a single page dedicated to online databases. This link can be a button, icon or tab, and it should be labeled intuitively, perhaps with an action-oriented phrase such as "Find Articles." Also, provide appropriate links to specific databases on various "topic pages" throughout your library's Website. For example, a link on the users' page for "Business Information" should lead patrons directly to one or more business databases, and pages for "Homework Help" should link to article collections useful for kids. Finally, use MARC records to connect paid online databases to the library catalog. These measures provide your library's network with additional points of access to online databases, enabling patrons to more easily and consistently find resources and information they seek.

2. Organize online databases within the dedicated page. The dedicated page should organize all available resources into a small number of intuitively named categories—"General Reference," "Newspapers," "Genealogy," etc. Because improved use is directly tied to prominent placement, consider listing paid online databases first within each of these categories. Also, keep in mind that some products provide multiple types of information and should be listed in all relevant areas. Beyond, categories significantly enhance the set-up of federated search systems, to guide users to the best sets of databases to search across.

3. Give each online database a short, meaningful description. When patrons understand what a particular online database does, it is more likely that they will use it to find information. Therefore, a short, clear description of the database's content and purpose should accompany its title. This is especially important because vendors do not always name products intuitively. Additionally, clear descriptions of databases are integral to the set-up of federated search systems, in which users are presented with multiple options.

4. Provide remote access and ensure that it works. While boosting use, remote access to online databases through your Website lessens traffic and strain on facilities on-site and frees patrons from restrictions like library hours, limits on session time and waiting in line. However, libraries should test (and retest) their remote access to make sure it works properly: this includes ensuring the URL is correct, the authentication method is user-friendly and the IP address has not changed.

5. Use language patrons will understand. Libraries serve a wide variety of patrons, and librarians' language must be suitable for the largest possible audience. The use of technical jargon in print and online promotions, instructions, labels and descriptions may prevent access to and use of online databases. Ultimately, use of intuitive, often "action-oriented" terms helps users make more productive access and use choices in less time. For instance, independent research shows that using terms such as "reference" instead of "Internet databases" leads patrons to the correct online resource. For more information, see "Library Terms that Users Understand" by John Kupersmith, available at www.jkup.net/terms.html.

For more information on increasing the use of paid online databases, contact NewsBank Customer Services by calling 800.243.7694 or emailing support@newsbank.com.