Videocassette kits for instruction in online searching

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How the DIALOG, BRS, and WILSONLINE instructional videos compare.

Videocassette kits are now available for instruction in online searching. This article analyzes and evaluates the three videos issued specifically for the purpose of training in three of the major services utilized in libraries—DIALOG, BRS, and WILSONLINE. Comparisons are made with the other instructional materials and services offered by these companies for online education, such as printed materials and training seminars.

DIALOG

The "Introduction to Searching DIALOG" videotape[1] and its accompanying instructional kit were issued in 1987. According to the pamphlet which comes with the $35 video,[2] its purpose is to give instruction to those who want to learn to use the DIALOG information system without attending one of the company's "System Seminars," as well as users of the system who have attended the one-day introductory class but wish to review the material learned. It claims to present the same material as the DIALOG System Seminar, and asserts that previous knowledge or experience using any search system is not required. The subjects the video aims to cover are intended to enable one to plan and conduct searches on DIALOG, understand the structure of databases, choose the appropriate database, and utilize basic commands, indexes, proximity operators, and field prefixes and suffixes.

The kit pamphlet contains ten search exercises intended for use in conjunction with the video. (The video pauses at three points for those who wish to do the exercises.) For this purpose, there are also seven search worksheets, as well as "Bluesheets" containing DIALOG's brief descriptions of four of its Ontap (ONline Training And Practice) databases: Compendex, ABI/Inform, Dun's Market Identifiers, and Ontap Dialindex. These Ontap databases are relatively inexpensive, practice databases containing material which is several years old.

Information is provided on how to become a DIALOG customer, and thus be able to do the practice exercises. Temporary passwords for using the Ontap databases can also be obtained. DIALOG permits its customers to make 25 copies of the video booklet for training purposes. An evaluation card is enclosed with each kit so that the purchaser can inform DIALOG of his or her reactions to it.

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[1]Half-inch VHS, 45 minutes; DIALOG Information Services, Inc., 3460 Hillview Ave., Palo Alto, CA 94304; (800) 334-2564, or (415) 858-2700. 1987. $35.

[2]"Introduction to Searching DIALOG: Instructions and Practice Exercises," DIALOG, May 1987, 23pp. An announced price increase of $15 for the video was rescinded in early 1988.

The "Introduction to DIALOG Searching" video is narrated by someone who introduces himself as Robert Chesney.[3] He has a casual air about him: his voice is calm—almost expressionless—and he wears an open white shirt with a blue sweater. He briefly notes what the viewer will learn and describes what online searching has to offer, particularly with DIALOG. Examples of searches are then given which focus on these subjects: the business aspects of aspirin packaging, government approval of Nutrasweet, job satisfaction and flexible work schedules, the cost of living in Hawaii, the use of alcohol fuels by trucks, the market for mechanical dishwashers, and a new product named "Tufsyn." Through these examples, one learns what a "set" is, how to use logical operators, proximity search codes, and the use of DIALOG's concise descriptions of databases on its Bluesheets. The databases shown include ABI Inform, Dun & Bradstreet, PTS PROMT, and Management Contents. Clearly, the searches are geared for business information professionals.

For much of the video, the narrator makes his points or describes an online search while the viewer stares at a video recording of an actual monitor. Unfortunately, this does not work: it is extremely difficult to see what is on the screen. (The poor quality of this central part of the production was confirmed by viewing a second new video obtained directly from DIALOG.) The results were far better in those parts of the production where animation was used to represent the characters on a monitor.

The unclear, unexciting visuals and the monotonous narration create a tedium which is relieved primarily by the opportunities to do the practice exercises. The small bit of music is insufficient to enliven it. Redoing the "on-screen" visuals would seem to be the easiest way for DIALOG to make this video more useful.

DIALOG's printed instructional materials are far superior to its major audiovisual production. For example, there is the *DIALOG System Seminar* which is used by students at DIALOG's one-day introductory class and can be taken home. One may also simply purchase it directly from DIALOG for only $15. It contains clear explanations of all the material included in the video, but in greater depth. It also has many more search questions and examples of searches. The *DIALOG Lab Workbook and Reference Manual* (September 1986) is supposedly "not intended for use by itself as a self-instructional manual," but it can be profitably used for precisely that purpose. It too costs only $15.

Brief pamphlets providing clear outlines of DIALOG searching are available free from the corporation: "DIALOG Basics" (September 1986) and "Pocket Guide to DIALOG" (January 1987). At the other end of the spectrum is the most comprehensive description of online procedures—*Searching DIALOG: The Complete Guide*—which superseded the *Guide to DIALOG Searching* when issued in December 1987. While it may not be the best introduction to the system, it will eventually be referred to by all users, and its precision can prove valuable to beginners who need clarification of a particular point. It includes numerous examples of searches. For $60, one receives *Searching DIALOG* with all the database Bluesheets, as well as the Dialorder Yellowsheets with their instructions for purchasing articles online.

BRS

BRS issued the first cassette of its three-video training program in 1986, and the rest the following year. Each of these 25-minute tapes in the BRS/SEARCH Service Video Training Course[4] costs $95 if purchased separately; the complete set retails for $245. Unlike the other training videos examined here, BRS is available in Beta and 3/4" U-Matic, as well as 1/2" VHS. (The U-Matic costs $7.50 more per tape.) Each cassette is available for a two-week preview for $25. This fee is applicable towards the price of the tape, if purchased.

Each training tape comes with a 40-page workbook. Both fit together in a rather bulky holder. Additional copies of each workbook can be purchased for $5.

The BRS tapes are, collectively, the longest-running of the training videos considered here, and the price of the set is several times that of the DIALOG and WILSONLINE products. This is offset somewhat by the coupon accompanying each cassette, which can be mailed in to receive $25 of free searching. The online time obtained for each coupon must be on one particular day, and it must be chosen in advance.

Now that production of all the tapes has been completed, BRS should transfer them all to one video and combine the workbooks. This would be far more convenient for users. Perhaps the company believes that customers would resist the high price for "only one" video. BRS should also consider lowering its price instead of using the cumbersome coupon-for-free-time procedure.

This product supports the proverb "You get what you pay for." It is the best made of the videos I saw. The narrator of the first cassette (who is off-screen, incidentally) not only has a particularly pleasant, clear voice, but one which is expressive. Her successor in the second and third installments also does much to make this an effective product. Moreover, the graphics are far superior to those of

[3]He is not identified, and does not appear in the *Directory of Library and Information Professionals*, 2 vols., Woodbridge, Conn., Research Publications, 1988.

[4]BRS Information Technologies, 1200 Route 7, Latham, NY 12110; (800) 345-4277 or (518) 783-1161. The tapes were produced by I.A. Associates.

the other productions. The videotaped searches are easy to read, and are frequently enhanced by animation and other techniques. There are close-ups of parts of the screen which help focus the viewer's attention. The pacing allows one to learn, but not get bogged down. Occasionally there is music in the background, including classical music.

At the start of the first video BRS does what it usually does on all its materials related to online searching: it gives its toll-free number to call for information. This will be especially appreciated by the beginners who are viewing this. The video provides some background on BRS, as well as telecommunication in general, and explains how one goes "online." It then shows how a young man interested in learning about the effect of knee injuries conducts a search using Sports Data Base.

Each of the three videos (labelled "Parts") contains three lessons numbered consecutively. The early lessons describe such things as operators, stop words, files, and fields, and the basic commands, such as "print" and "off." Explanations of BRS' AIDPAGES—the two-page descriptions of each database—as well as of the comprehensive Data Base Guides, are provided. BRS' various printed guides are frequently shown on these videos, not merely referred to. This is an effective instructional technique.

The second video shows a woman conducting searches. Here, PSYCH Info, an expanded version of *Psychological Abstracts*, is utilized. The last cassette features a woman conducting a search in a library setting, as well as a search in a business office. The treatment of eating disorders is the subject of a search, as viewers learn about cros, BRS's index to multiple databases, as well as the other features which have counterparts in DIALOG.

The remaining searches in the training program are, not surprisingly, within BRS's specialty—healthcare. At the end of the video the viewer is encouraged to fill out the evaluation form that comes with the kit and mail it to BRS.

Excellent print alternatives for learning about the BRS system are also available. The 126-page *Introductory Training Course Syllabus* (1987), given free at training seminars, can also be purchased for $25.[5] The comprehensive guide to BRS is the 168-page looseleaf work, BRS/SEARCH Service *User's Manual* (September 1985). It costs only $35. As with DIALOG's analogous works, these are all clearly written, and can easily be used for self-paced learning.

WILSONLINE

"Online Searching: An Introduction to WILSONLINE," is a 32-minute video which retails for $89. Produced in 1986 by The Visual Education Corporation for the H.W. Wilson Company,[6] it is available in ½" VHS. There is no accompanying workbook.

The video aims to introduce viewers to the principles of online bibliographic retrieval and the basic procedures of the WILSONLINE Information System. It includes material on the WILSEARCH software program, which enables WILSONLINE searching through an easy, menu-driven approach. There are two narrators who are frequently on-screen: John J. Regazzi, Wilson's vice-president for computer services, and Rhoda Garoogian, the company's manager of training and documentation.

In this tape it is not only stated that a wide variety of people need WILSONLINE, but there is an attempt to show this. It begins with a scene in what appears to be a college library. An inquirer needs to know about "China's present population policy." The place to look, we learn, is the material indexed in Wilson's *Social Sciences Index*. The next search shows a student who needs information about divorce, mediation, and reconciliation. Subsequent searches are made about literary figures, as well as about non-academic needs, such as pasta recipes. A teenager is shown conducting a search using WILSEARCH. Thus, one sees the WILSONLINE Information System being used by the general population, as well as by information professionals who are white, black, young, old, male, and female. Moreover, we are told that online searching for information can be less expensive than using the familiar printed Wilson indexes.

The searches one sees on the screen are not difficult to read. Through them we learn about the various techniques for utilizing the WILSONLINE system. The basic ones are much like those of DIALOG and BRS: Boolean searching, truncation, expanding, proximity searching, etc.

Parts of the production are amateurishly done—almost embarrassingly so. When John Regazzi shows Venn diagrams to explain the Boolean principles underlying searches, they are hand-drawn, misshapen, and ridiculous. Although some librarians will enjoy seeing Rhoda Garoogian and Regazzi (fellow members of the professional family) on the screen, many might prefer more polished performances by individuals who come across more effectively on video. (Incidentally, in a brief clip one gets to see one of the legendary Wilson indexers working *in situ*.)

Unlike the DIALOG and BRS videos, there is no accompanying evaluation questionnaire to return to the company. Instead, WILSONLINE has mailed one to purchasers of its video inquiring about its use and effectiveness. Those who respond

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[5]Another publication, the BRS Training Workbook, is no longer available.

[6]H.W. Wilson Co., 950 University Ave., Bronx, NY 10452; (800) 622-4002, (800) 538-3888 in New York State, and (212) 588-8998. The Visual Education Corporation is based in Princeton, New Jersey. The video was written and produced by Tyler Wasson.

will be informed of the findings.

The folder accompanying the video states that the production is an introduction, and that more detailed information, as well as practical exercises, are available in the *WILSONLINE Tutorial* and the *WILSONLINE Guide and Documentation*. In fact, the former, which comprises part of the latter publication, is no longer available as a separate item. The *WILSONLINE Guide and Documentation* (1984, 1986), is thus the major source for information concerning the operation of this search system. Within its large three-ring binder are descriptions of the various databases, procedures for searching, and search exercises and examples. Well organized and clearly written, it can certainly be used for tutorials or self-instruction. However, this comprehensive guide costs $55; hopefully, the Tutorial will be reissued. There is a "Wilson Quick Reference Guide" pamphlet (February 1987) available, which is free. The 47-page "WILSEARCH Guide" (October 1986) is free with the purchase of the WILSEARCH software.

Conclusion

The primary training videos produced by three of the major information services used by libraries—DIALOG, BRS, and WILSONLINE—vary greatly in quality and price. A decision about whether to utilize them should be made in the context of the alternative means of accomplishing the same goal: education for online searching. Unlike their video products, the printed documentation issued by all three companies is uniformly excellent. Each has a one-volume, comprehensive guide to the search system costing from $35 to $55. These manuals are precisely and clearly written. The cost of the special instructional manuals of DIALOG and BRS are $15 and $25, respectively.

The detailed, printed descriptions of all the databases available from DIALOG and BRS fill two bookshelves in their three-ring binders. For the former, the set costs more than $1,000; for the latter, about $500. (DIALOG has many more databases than BRS, and its database descriptions tend to be longer.) While these are extremely useful when conducting searches, full sets are certainly not needed for instructional purposes.

Another alternative to the videos are the one-day, introductory training sessions offered by these companies. The charge for these are $125 for DIALOG, $110 for BRS, and $60 for WILSONLINE. One gets to keep the training manuals utilized there, and one frequently receives free search time back at the user's library.

Some who attend these seminars consider them excellent, well-planned introductions, while others find them to be mere oral recitations of the printed material handed out there. The free practice search time available on the day of training is thought to be very useful by some. Others are frustrated when they find themselves crowded around an insufficient number of "dumb" terminals awaiting their turn for some hands-on practice.

These training sessions are not readily available outside of large urban areas, so the primary financial cost here may well be travel to the class site and

Memory tickler for procrastinators

Yes, fellow procrastinators, even though the deadline for submitting program proposals for the 1989 National Conference is upon us, you still have time to organize your ideas for a possible panel presentation, discussion group session, idea brief, or poster session. As you recall, our conference theme, "Building on the First Century," is a topic which has infinite program possibilities. The ACRL Research Committee has identified many topics which interest our membership. If you are having a difficult time selecting a topic, perhaps one of these will be the *one* for you:

Assessment of effectiveness, evaluation of libraries, library systems, and services compose an evaluative category which has become top priority with many of us. A variety of personnel issues such as staff development, or salary studies based on training, sex and experience are topics to be investigated. Reports on collection management, circulation systems, management of theft and vandalism, shelving of collections and user studies are welcomed. Naturally, automation is on everyone's agenda in some form with emphasis on online systems, online education issues, online searching and CD-ROM capabilities. Also, the following topics deserve your consideration: preservation; the history of books and bookmaking, printing and publishing; and the history of library education in the U.S. and in other countries. Finally, fees and freedom of access are timely topics of interest to many.

The preceding is by no means the definitive list. Now that your mind is reeling with great ideas, there are a few other important things that you need to know. Programs may be either 30 or 60 minutes in length. Presenters must attend the conference at their own expense. Additional information will be sent upon receipt of a program proposal. Program proposals should include a 200-word description of the program, the tentative title, and name, mailing address and work phone number of the contact person. The deadline for submitting a program proposal is July 31, 1988. Send proposals to Jordan Scepanski, ACRL Program, University Library and Learning Resources, California State University, Long Beach, 1250 Bellflower Boulevard, Long Beach, CA 90840.—*Mary Ellen Rutledge Elsbernd, Publicity Chair, ACRL National Conference Committee.*

the hotel bill for an overnight stay. Approaching the companies to send a trainer to your library will thus be the most economical approach in some cases. DIALOG charges $1,285 to send an instructor for one day, and allows up to twelve students in the class. BRS will do the same if there are a minimum of eight trainees paying $110 each. An on-site teacher from WILSONLINE can be had for $600. There is no limit on the number of trainees allowed by the Bronx-based enterprise, although the company would like to instruct at least ten students. The aforementioned charges cover everything, including instructional materials. Online terminals must be provided by the sponsoring institution.

As with other products and services purchased by libraries, the availability and the prices of these wares and services are not constant, and special package deals are sometimes offered. The information one receives in brochures dates quickly. Unfortunately, there seem to be more problems in suc-cessfully placing orders with these companies than with the vendors librarians usually deal with. Those providing information, or taking orders, at the other end of the 800 numbers too often seem misinformed or confused about company offerings. Calling back to check the information received with another employee is often wise. Unfortunately, requesting to speak to someone in a position of authority is sometimes necessary.

In sum, there are several different ways of learning to do online searching. While the printed instructional materials and the documentation for DIALOG, BRS, and WILSONLINE are excellent, the videos they have produced vary greatly in quality. WILSONLINE's can be effectively used to interest neophytes in the system and assist in their instruction. The BRS series of tapes and workbooks can be utilized as the center of a brief course of study. Those interested in using DIALOG's video should view it before committing themselves. ■■

ACRL executive summary

Professional development

The Western European Specialists Section (WESS) held ACRL's first overseas conference in Florence, Italy, on April 4–8. The conference attracted 170 participants from 20 countries; almost half were from outside the United States. The sessions featured speakers and panelist from the North American and European library and book publishing communities. Social events were spectacularly held in one Renaissance setting after another. For more details, see Claire Dudley's report on pp.355–57.

The Community and Junior College Libraries Section (CJCLS) held ACRL's first teleconference, and it too was a great success. Beamed by satellite to more than 320 sites in 47 states, the program, which focused on CD-ROM technology, reached more than 4,000 individuals (see photo next page). The section is now planning a sequel.

President Joanne Euster addressed a group of ACRL members in the Chicago area at a National Library Week reception held at ALA headquarters on April 18. Her talk, "Creative Leadership in Academic Libraries: Everyone's Responsibility," gave the audience much to talk about as they mingled with ALA staff at the reception.

Joanne also led a workshop on academic status at the ACRL Mississippi Chapter meeting and addressed a five-state conference in LaCrosse, Wisconsin, at the end of April on "Creative Leadership in Academic Libraries: Everyone's Responsibility."

Enhancing service capability

ACRL signed a contract with Nancy Van House (UC-Berkeley) for the writing of an *Output Measures Manual*. Work has begun on the pilot testing of these measures. A fact sheet on the project is available from the ALA Public Information Office.

Beverly Lynch, chair of the ACRL Historically Black College and University Library Project Planning Committee, appeared before the ALA Executive Board to present the National Endowment for the Humanities funding proposal. It had been submitted contingent upon their approval, which they granted.

Advocacy and liaison

Legislative Day, April 19, included a large delegation of academic librarians, thanks to the work of Legislative Committee chair, Hal Shill.

Donald Simpson, President of the Center for Research Libraries, and ACRL President Joanne Euster, at the NLW reception.