was the best initial investment in optical disk-based periodical indexes for Woodward Library. The evaluation process utilized by Woodward Library differs from other processes that have been conducted. The criteria used went beyond comparing the features of the products evaluated. Furthermore, as stated by Carol Reese, "...the major method of evaluation employed to date has been through the use of user surveys...."[4] An exception to this method is described in the Reese article, and

also in a more recent article by Christine Guyonneau.[5] Both of these articles describe the process in which selected periodical indexes are compared through analyses of selected topics' coverage in the indexes. A third process is now suggested. Computerized periodical index products with comparable subject scopes are compared based on their individual coverage of a local library's periodicals collection, and the rate of success which users have in finding the indexed articles within that library, once the articles are identified.

Beyond the decision of what product or combination of products to buy is the need to clarify this new technology's role in libraries. Will it replace, supplement, or simply coexist with other library tools? Once the role is clarified, then the technology can be used to its fullest potential in each library setting. ■■

[4]Carol Reese, "Manual Indexes Versus Computer-Aided Indexes: Comparing the Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature to InfoTrac II," *RQ*, Spring 1988, p. 384.
[5]Reese, pp. 384–89; Christine H. Guyonneau, "Magazine Index Plus or Academic Index?" *College and Research Libraries News*, July/August 1988, pp. 430–33.

Users' reactions to InfoTrac in an undergraduate library

by **Ellen P. Flynn**

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Further data on a popular optical disk index.

The Pennsylvania State University's Ogontz Campus Library is currently using the Information Access Company's *Academic Index* on InfoTrac II on a trial basis. The Library administered a questionnaire to the users of InfoTrac between March 17 and May 1, 1988, to gauge the users' reactions and examine the suitability of continuing the system on a permanent basis.

The Ogontz Campus is one of twenty branch campuses of the Pennsylvania State University. Students may enroll in a two-year associate degree program or begin the first two years of a baccalaureate program. More than 120 Penn State baccalaureate majors are available at the Ogontz Cam-

QUESTIONNAIRE

Questions	Respondents	Agree strongly	Agree somewhat	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree somewhat	Disagree strongly
InfoTrac can be used without formal training or instructions.	92	67(73%)	22(24%)	2(.02%)	1(.01%)	0
"HELP" screens provide valuable information for using InfoTrac.	87	53(61%)	20(23%)	12(14%)	2(.02%)	0
I successfully answered my research question using InfoTrac.	90	57(63%)	21(23%)	8(.09%)	3(.03%)	1(.01%)
Overall, InfoTrac is easy to use.	92	76(83%)	14(15%)	2(.02%)	0	0
I prefer to use InfoTrac over comparable reference tools.	92	71(77%)	17(18%)	4(.04%)	0	0

92 Users Responding: 83 Students, 6 Faculty, 1 Business Person, 4 Status not given.

pus. Current enrollment is 3,221 students, 58% percent of whom are deficient in math or English.

The Library contains a collection of books and periodicals geared to the first two years of undergraduate studies. Penn State's online catalog, LIAS, enables faculty and students to access the collections of the other campuses and facilitates intercampus loan within the system.

InfoTrac is an automated reference system which allows retrieval of bibliographic records stored on a compact disk. The disks are updated monthly. The *Academic Index* database is designed for research in the humanities, social sciences, general sciences, and current events. The Index provides citations to over 375 scholarly and general-interest periodicals, as well as citations from *The New York Times*. Periodical coverage extends from 1985 to the present for general-interest titles and from 1987 to the present for scholarly titles. *The New York Times* citations cover the latest six months. The Ogontz Library owns thirty-six percent of the titles indexed.

After tallying the responses on the questionnaires given to the InfoTrac users during the trial period, the Library found the results and observations to be resoundingly positive. A total of ninety-two users completed the questionnaires between March 17 and May 1. Eighty-three (90%) of the respondents were students, six (0.07%) of the users were faculty, one was a business person (0.01%), and one did not give a status (0.01%). The majority (73%) of the users strongly agreed that InfoTrac can be used without formal training or instruction. Sixty-three percent felt that they successfully answered their reference questions using InfoTrac. A significant number (83%) found InfoTrac easy to use, and 73% preferred InfoTrac to comparable reference tools.

For the reference librarians, the most gratifying aspect of the InfoTrac trial was the enthusiasm it generated among students, as the following comments show:

"There is nothing like InfoTrac. It is so convenient and easy to use. Finding articles is no longer the labor it once was. This is a great addition to our library."

"Most incredible source of research assistance I ever used!"

"I like it a lot. It's new and exciting."

"Very easy to operate, cuts down on research time."

"I found InfoTrac to be an excellent source that I hope to use more in the future. I don't think any student can disagree."

"Love it!"

The only negative comments, one from a faculty member and two from students, regarded the limited time period covered by the *Academic Index* and the fact that the Library doesn't own all the references covered in the Index. The first complaint is easily remedied by referring patrons to printed indexes to access material before 1985. The second complaint can be remedied through utilizing intercampus and interlibrary loan. The Index may also help in collection development by pinpointing gaps in the periodical collection.

On the down side, there are the usual problems likely to be encountered with any computer equipment. The printer jammed periodically but was easily fixed by realigning the paper. The PC itself had to be replaced shortly after we received it, but IAC rectified the problem promptly. There are options available in regulating the use of the PC. The Library elected to disconnect one of these options, the "print screen" function, so that citations would be printed out one at a time and paper would not be wasted by continual printing of whole screens and citations not really needed.

In terms of searching, locating the exact heading or subheading used for a particular topic may require more time in InfoTrac than in a printed index. However, browsing the subject guide and the list of "see also" references does facilitate the search, and the students seemed to find the time involved with research less with InfoTrac than with the printed indexes. They considered the fact that the citations were printed out for them to be a definite plus.

Finally, librarians need to remind students that InfoTrac should be used in conjunction with printed indexes for complete coverage of a topic.

In my opinion, the advantages of InfoTrac far outweigh the flaws. As noted previously, ease of use is quite important in attracting students. InfoTrac's uncomplicated search system is enhanced by an instruction card on the front of the PC, which is matched to color-coded keys, including a "help" key. This guides students to the proper subject heading or subheading.

The major advantage is that the Ogontz students, many of whom are reluctant library users, were so excited about InfoTrac that they not only spent more time researching their topics than they ordinarily would have, but they also seemed to enjoy doing so—the highest praise of all for the system. ■■