



ADVISOR REVIEWS—COMPARATIVE REVIEW

A Comparative Evaluation of EBSCO Business Source Complete and ProQuest ABI/Inform

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Composite Score: EBSCO Business Source Complete ★★★ 3/4
 Composite Score: ProQuest ABI/Inform ★★★

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Pricing Options

Both EBSCO Business Source Complete and ProQuest ABI/Inform have complex pricing structures, and therefore individual institutions will need to negotiate pricing on a case-by-case basis. Both EBSCO and ProQuest are willing to negotiate pricing through consortia.

Product Description

EBSCO Business Source Complete and ProQuest ABI/Inform are databases that provide indexing for a wide variety of journal articles. In most cases, these databases also provide full-text access to these articles. In addition to journal articles, they provide access to non-journal articles and reports such as business case studies, industry reports, and conference proceedings.

These databases are appropriate for individuals interested in both the academic and practitioner aspects of business, finance, and management. Potential users of these databases could include business, finance, and management students, business faculty members at an academic institution, and practicing managers.

It is possible to purchase different EBSCO and ProQuest business databases that contain portions of what is in Business Source Complete and ABI/Inform. To be clear, in this review I examine Business Source Complete and ABI/Inform, both of which offer the complete range of content. The key differences between these two products lie in three key areas: the search interface, the collection of and access to journal articles, and the diversity of nonjournal articles and reports.

Critical Evaluation

SEARCH INTERFACE

Appearance and Structure

The overall appearance and product structure of Business Source Complete has a clean look with simple colors. The physical layout of the tabs, the text boxes, and various search features make it easy to navigate, even for novice users. The default page shows the Advanced Search, which has text boxes at the top, a browse feature on the right, and a box lower down on the page that allows the user to limit his search strategy.

The overall appearance and product structure of ABI/Inform is also clean and simple. There is a lot of white space, with almost no color on the page. The default page shows the Advanced Search. Text boxes are at the top, there is a link to a browse topics page, and there is a link to expand the More Search Options list.

Both databases have interfaces with structural similarities. However, overall the Business Source Complete interface is better than the ABI/Inform interface, because users do not have to do the extra step of clicking to be able to browse or to limit their search. Business Source Complete provides search options on the Advanced Search page without making it look crowded, partly because of its smart use of color.

Search Capabilities

There are three modes of searching when using Business Source Complete: Basic, Advanced, and Visual. The Basic Search page pro-



“At a Glance” Comparative Review Scores

The maximum number of stars in each category is five.

	EBSCO Business Source Complete	ProQuest ABI/Inform
Composite Score	★★★ 3/4	★★★
Content	★★★★	★★ 1/2
Searchability	★★★★★	★★★ 1/2
Pricing Options:	★★★	★★★
Contract Options:	★★★	★★★

vides access to a very simple search interface. It has one text box, and includes a few simple options to browse. The Advanced Search provides a very sophisticated mechanism for searching (including Boolean and proximity capabilities), browsing, and limiting. While the mechanism is sophisticated, its physical structure makes it easy to navigate. The Visual Search option is a very innovative and unique approach to searching; it uses colors and shapes throughout the search process to facilitate sorting the results further and further in order to help users find that one current topical article.

There are two modes of searching when using ABI/Inform: Basic and Advanced. The Basic Search page provides access to a very simple search interface. There is one text box with a few functions to help with limiting the search strategy. The Advanced Search page looks very similar, but it has a few extra lines of text boxes that facilitate Boolean searching. The Advanced Search page also has a drop-down menu beside each text box allowing the user to limit the search by various fields. ABI/Inform has the potential to help users develop sophisticated search strategies.

The Basic Search pages for both Business Source Complete and ProQuest are very similar. The Advanced Pages for both of these databases provide the user with the ability to perform very specific and sophisticated searches. Business Source Complete has a superior Advanced Search over ABI/Inform because of how user-friendly and accessible the search features are. The Visual Search offered by Business Source Complete is very impressive. This innovation may not appeal to everyone, but it does provide an additional option for users, especially if they have a visual learning style.

Both Business Source Complete and ABI/Inform have tools to help users improve and narrow their results after they have entered their initial search strategy. For example, Business Source Complete allows the user to filter results by resource type using clearly visible options across the top. Alternatively, a user can narrow a search strategy using options on a menu on the left. ABI/Inform provides topics in a box above the search results, which provides the user with potential synonyms or alternative search phrases to help improve the accuracy of the articles he retrieves. In addition, ABI/Inform allows the user to narrow by resource type. Both products have excellent features geared towards enabling users to improve or narrow search strategies; however, the features provided by Business Source Complete seem to be more user-friendly.

Export Functions

Both Business Source Complete and ABI/Inform have excellent export features, and they are very comparable. Both databases allow users various export options, including the options to e-mail, print, or download records. In addition, users can download citations into a variety of different bibliographic management software systems. Both databases also provide users with stable links to articles within the database.

Help Features

Both Business Source Complete and ABI/Inform have visible and accessible links to Help. The Help link within both databases provides information on search tips and developing a search strategy, and they are of comparable quality. Further, both Business Source Complete and ABI/Inform provide access to technical support. Business Source Complete provides easily accessible contact information, such as toll-free phone numbers, to 24-hour technical support. ABI/Inform provides contact information, but the toll-free phone numbers were more difficult to find on its Web page. ABI/Inform buries its phone num-

bers for technical support in a large table of many different phone numbers and has limited hours when it provides technical support. Therefore, Business Source Complete has a superior technical support Help system in place because support is available 24-hours a day and the phone number was very easy to find.

RSS Feeds

Both Business Source Complete and ABI/Inform have RSS feed functionality. When users enter their search string, they can create an alert for their search by selecting the RSS feed feature. When Business Source Complete or ABI/Inform index new articles that match the search profile, users receive that new information. Both databases have comparable RSS feed functionalities.

JOURNAL HOLDINGS AND FULL-TEXT ACCESS

In terms of journal article content specifically, both Business Source Complete and ABI/Inform have a large, quality collection. There is overlap, but each product also has some unique material. As of April 2009, Business Source Complete had indexed 4,331 journal titles, of which 2,401 were peer-reviewed, and 3,370 were available in full text. As of April 2009, ABI/Inform had indexed 4,345 journal titles, 1,800 of which were peer-reviewed, and 2,719 were available in full text.

To learn more about holdings and full-text accessibility between the two journals, I did a search in Journal Citation Report to determine the top 25 journals in business, finance, and management, according to the five-year impact factor. I then compared the holdings and embargos between Business Source Complete. Of the 25 journals in this list, Business Source Complete has 20 available in full text, and ABI/Inform has 16 in full text. Of the remaining 20 journals available in full text from Business Source Complete, 8 journals have current full-text availability and 9 journals have a 12- or 24-month embargo. Of the remaining 16 journals available in full text from ABI/Inform, 1 has current full-text availability and 5 have a 12- or 24-month embargo. Clearly here among these top tier business, finance, and management journals, Business Source Complete has superior holdings and full-text access over ABI/Inform.

Further, *Harvard Business Review* is a popular journal in any business school. Business Source Complete offers full-text access to *Harvard Business Review* from 1922 to the present. ABI/Inform does not offer any full-text access to *Harvard Business Review*.

NONJOURNAL ARTICLE CONTENT

In addition to journal content, Business Source Complete provides access to books and monographs, case studies, company profiles, conference proceedings, country reports, financial data, industry reports, investment research reports, market research reports, SWOT analyses, and trade journals. In addition to journal content, ABI/Inform provides access to the *Wall Street Journal* and *Financial Times*, working papers, business cases, annual reports, country reports, dissertations, and SWOT analyses.

Both Business Source Complete and ABI/Inform have quality non-journal reports that compliment each other. For example, Business Source Complete offers access to Datamonitor SWOT analyses, whereas ABI/Inform offers other SWOT analyses published by a variety of other sources, excluding Datamonitor. Both databases provide SWOT analyses, but from different sources. Business Source Complete indexes Harvard Business Cases, whereas ABI/Inform indexes the Richard Ivey School of Business Case Collection, the Darden



EBSCO Business Source Complete Review Scores Composite: ★★☆☆ 3/4

The maximum number of stars in each category is 5.

Content: ★★☆☆

Excellent content coverage and full-text access to journal articles. Good additional access to some nonjournal resources.

Searchability: ★★☆☆

Excellent search features, with a superbly designed interface. The Advanced Search provides user-friendly and intuitive options for searching, browsing, and narrowing. In addition, the visual search option provides a unique and innovative method for searching that might appeal to those with a visual learning style.

Pricing Options: ★★☆☆

Individual institutions need to negotiate pricing.

Contract Options: ★★☆☆

Over time, access to full-text articles can change, depending on EBSCO's negotiations with publishers. This can potentially lead to lack of stability with holdings.

Business Publishing Case Collection, and the Thunderbird Case Collection. Both databases provide access to cases, but cases published by different publishers. While both databases provide access to similar types of information, the sources of information differ. Both resources offer good information with little duplication, and therefore they are complementary products.

Especially in academic institutions, access to dissertations is essential. Business Source Complete does not provide access to any dissertations. In contrast, ABI/Inform provides access to full-text master's and doctoral level theses, published by graduate students from around the world.

Content Stability

Availability of stable content over time is one concern with both EBSCO Business Source Complete and ProQuest ABI/Inform. Specifically, both databases have had changes in their holdings and availability of full-text articles over time, and it seems there is little that a subscriber can do. Publishers negotiate contracts with both EBSCO and ProQuest and can enforce embargos to withdraw their content. Because EBSCO and ProQuest are competitors, sometimes content goes from one database to the other. This lack of content stability can be frustrating for institutions because institutions will often need to purchase both Business Source Complete and ABI/Inform to ensure complete content coverage.

Comparing Search Results

In this critical evaluation comparing Business Source Complete with ABI/Inform, I have examined the differences and similarities in three main areas including the search interface, the collection and access to journal articles, and the diversity of nonjournal articles and reports. In this section of the critical evaluation, and taking into account these

three areas, I explain the results I find when I do an Advanced Search in both Business Source Complete and ABI/Inform.

In both databases, I did an Advanced Search, limited the date range to January 2009 to May 2009, entered in the phrase "leadership and innovation," and limited these words to the abstract.

In Business Source Complete, this search resulted in 59 hits. An easy option allows you to narrow by resource type, meaning that the 59 hits include both journal and nonjournal resources. However, it is possible to limit the results to academic articles, trade publications, or magazines. Of the 59 hits, 21 were academic articles, 21 were magazines, and 16 were trade publications. This adds up to 58, and I am not sure how Business Source Complete has categorized the 59th article.

It is very easy to narrow the search results down. Business Source Complete provides the option to narrow by thesaurus term (such as leadership, technological innovations, innovations in business, or management). Users can also narrow by subject, publication, company, publication type, or geography, all of which are easy to use and intuitive.

Of the 10 results on the first page, 7 are available in full-text through Business Source Complete. In one case, cited reference information is available from the results page, and in another case, thumbnail sized images are also available from that first results page.

Other easy-to-use features from this first result screen include the ability to sort by date, sources, author, or relevance. Further, users can directly create an RSS feed to this search strategy, refine a search, or create a stable link to a specific search.

In ABI/Inform, this search resulted in 284 hits. Similar to Business Source Complete, there is a feature to narrow these hits down to resource type. Whereas Business Source Complete had 3 resource types, ABI/Inform has 5 resource types. Of the 284 hits, 34 were scholarly,



ProQuest ABI/Inform Review Scores Composite: ★★☆☆

The maximum number of stars in each category is 5.

Content: ★★ 1/2

Good coverage of journal articles, however many of the articles have limited holdings and full-text access. Good coverage of nonjournal information.

Searchability: ★★★ 1/2

Good search interface, allows for sophisticated search strategies.

Pricing Options: ★★★

Individual institutions need to negotiate pricing.

Contract Options: ★★★

Over time, access to full-text articles can change, depending on ProQuest's negotiations with publishers. This can potentially lead to lack of stability with holdings.

11 were magazines, 74 were trade publications, 15 were newspapers, and 5 were reference/reports. This adds up to 139, and I am not clear how ABI/Inform has categorized the 145 remaining hits.

Business Source Complete provides several additional mechanisms to narrow results from that first results screen. Only ABI/Inform provides the additional option to limit by full-text article. Business Source Complete provides several different options for narrowing search strategies, including thesaurus term, publication, company, publication type, and geography. I find these criteria for narrowing much more relevant than narrowing by full-text access.

In addition, Business Source Complete provides thesaurus terms from the results page, which narrows the results. By contrast, ABI/Inform provides subject terms, but they do not function to narrow the search. Instead, they expand the search. For example, "innovation and leadership" is one of the subject terms provided by ABI/Inform. Clicking on this term launches a new subject search, which results in 669 hits. The philosophy behind selecting thesaurus or search terms is different in these different products. Business Source Complete narrows and refines; ABI/Inform expands.

As with Business Source Complete, ABI/Inform makes the links to full-text articles available from the results page. Other features that ABI/Inform provides from this results page include the ability to sort by date (newest first) or relevance (most relevant first). Business Source Complete allows for sorting by date, source, author, or relevance, whereas ABI/Inform only allows sorting by most recent first or by most relevant first. ABI/Inform provides links to setting up alerts and RSS feeds from this initial search page as well.

To summarize the search results from the same search covering the same dates in both Business Source Complete and ABI/Inform, I retrieved more hits from ABI/Inform than from Business Source Complete. I found Business Source Complete had an easy-to-use and in-

tuitive search screen that made it easy for me to narrow my search, and find relevant articles. In contrast, ABI/Inform did not have search features that made it as easy to narrow my search. In fact, they provided subject terms that expanded my search. The sorting feature in Business Source Complete was more sophisticated than the sorting feature in ABI/Inform. I was also perplexed that ABI/Inform did not categorize all the results by resource type. Of the 284 hits, ABI/Inform categorized 139, leaving 145 uncategorized, limiting the usefulness of this feature. In this one search example, and taking into

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account the search interface, the journal, and nonjournal content, I found Business Source Complete more intuitive, more effective, and easier to narrow results in, compared with ABI/Inform.

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