



Issues Facing Academic Library Consortia and Perceptions of Members of the Illinois Digital Academic Library

Sam Brooks, with a contribution by Thomas J. Dorst

abstract: This article discusses the role of consortia in academic libraries, specifically the Illinois Digital Academic Library (IDAL). Interviews were conducted with several Illinois academic librarians representing a cross-section of university libraries. The article focuses on a variety of issues surrounding full text database research including content, searching functionality, peer-reviewed status, embargoes, publisher relations, etc. The conclusion affirms the validity and benefit of IDAL as experienced by member libraries.

Academic libraries have been expanding upon consortial relationships for well over 100 years. As early as the 1880s *Library Journal* published articles on library cooperation, which suggested that libraries work together to share their collections.¹ Today consortia range anywhere from multi-state regional associations to groups designed to meet the needs of a narrowly focused cluster of libraries. In fact, it is common for a library to be a member of a number of consortia, some mandated, for a variety of reasons.² This study of the Illinois Digital Academic Library (IDAL) discusses its member libraries' involvement and experiences with electronic resources made available through this state-wide, academic library consortium.

Background on IDAL

IDAL is currently an informally organized academic library consortium. Institutions participate in IDAL, rather than join it. There is no formal membership structure nor are dues charged. The program provides resources and services to 150 public and private

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academic libraries serving more than 750,000 students and faculty. The Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) subsidizes IDAL's offerings for the benefit of the statewide academic community. The goal of the IDAL initiative is to provide a high quality collection of full text and image digitized resources that supports instruction, study, and research by students, faculty and staff in all eligible Illinois higher education institutions. Eligibility to participate in the Illinois Digital Academic Library project requires only that an institution of higher education be recognized by the IBHE and that the library (or libraries) of the institution are part of the statewide ILLINET resource sharing network.³

The IDAL program was inaugurated in August of 1999 with a grant from the IBHE. It evolved from an original idea proposed by the Council of Directors of State University Libraries (CODSULI). Planning and support for the initial grant was provided by the Illinois Library Computer Systems Organization (ILCSO). IDAL began providing electronic resources to its core audience in February 2000. In the first year of operation, more than 2 million searches were conducted using these resources, and more than 1.2 million full text articles and monographs were used. However, it is interesting to note, that in the first semester of the 2000/2001 academic year, an average of 275,000 searches were conducted every month. At this pace, usage will well surpass 3 million searches this year. This may be attributed to several factors, including familiarity and growing confidence in newly acquired resources.

Prior to detailing the research conducted with participating libraries and analyzing the results, it is important to gain an understanding of the perception of the state of academic libraries and to discuss the impact of electronic resources on teaching, study, and research, and the operation of the academic library. To that end, Thomas J. Dorst, IDAL Director, has provided the following foreword, "The Role of Consortia" as an insight into the history and importance of such resources and the role a consortium can play in establishing and perpetuating these valuable offerings.

The Role of Consortia by Thomas J. Dorst

Historically, the use of academic libraries—especially by undergraduates—has been driven by convenience. In the days before online catalogs and searchable databases,

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much less before the advent of full-text digital collections, students used books and journals that came easily to hand in the college/university library. Researching an undergraduate term paper began, and frequently ended, in the reference room of the library. Little use was made of inter-library loan, because of time constraints. While the typical undergradu-

ate paper lacked depth, it was based on sources that had been selected consciously to meet the institution's educational mission.

When online catalogs and database searching emerged, it became convenient to delve more deeply into the resources of one's home library. However, a new problem



arose when the convenience of incomplete electronic references was equated with comprehensiveness and authoritativeness. Students, undergraduate and graduate, and even faculty began to limit their searching to the electronic sources. If it wasn't in the computer, it didn't really exist. Therefore, retrospective conversion and document delivery became high priorities. Prior to the advent of large-scale, full-text databases, the digital component in the information seeking process was a description of an information resource (i.e., a catalog record or bibliographic citation). The ultimate object remained a printed document (i.e., a book or journal). The quality and reliability of the information object was still validated implicitly by its inclusion in the library's collection.

In less than a decade, both information seeking behavior and the library's primacy as definer of the intellectual record in the academy have been—and continue to be—transformed. The Internet, and especially the Web, have disconnected the student and faculty from the library as a frequent and essential physical destination. This is not necessarily a bad thing as long as the library continues to play its traditional role as the authoritative evaluator and organizer of core information that supports teaching, learning, and research. In other words, if the electronic resources evaluated, organized, and delivered by the academic

library's automated systems continue to be seen as information sources superior to the unevaluated and—in some cases—demonstrably unreliable information on the Web, then the academic library will remain strong and essential to academic and scholarly success.

However, if students and faculty

come to believe that everything on the Web is equally authoritative and trustworthy and that the end user can master this domain without the intervention of librarians and the library's collections, then the educational enterprise will suffer and libraries will struggle to compete for scarce institutional resources. The library's historical reputation for providing authoritative information is its principal strength in the struggle with the web-fueled information explosion.

IDAL, as an example, has stressed the quality and broad utility of the resources it has selected. This means that packages of resources must come from substantial publishers and aggregators. Database content must include a significant proportion of peer-reviewed articles or must be amenable to evaluation by library professionals whose institutions participate in IDAL.

The two most important factors in the success of library-provided, commercial information content will continue to be the quality of the searching interfaces developed by vendors and/or library consortia and the ability to easily link a document or citation to related text, images, and data, regardless of their source. Coming generations of students will be thoroughly immersed in an AOL-style of information-seeking behavior. While the academic library needn't aspire to adopt this sometimes chaotic model entirely, it must acknowledge and manage the information seeking behavior of future generations. Initial use statistics suggest that IDAL users are accepting its database offerings as high

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quality, but the issues of easy access and linked information remain works in progress.

Another noteworthy, though not universally welcomed change that has come with increased reliance on electronic information is the shift from title-specific selection, based on a single institution's expressed needs, to accepting the acquisition of aggregated content, intended to serve the collective needs of a consortium. It is increasingly common for libraries to be offered cost incentives to take a publisher's entire list of electronic titles or an aggregator's predefined package of titles. IDAL has taken the position that unless there are serious quality deficiencies, there are usually no compelling reasons to refuse such offers simply to defend the principal of title-by-title selection. We realize that this is not a universally held point of view within the library community. So far, however, we are unconvinced that insisting that libraries follow the model of print-based selection is economically or strategically compelling.

Initial and admittedly anecdotal evidence suggests that many journal titles that come "with the aggregator's package" (i.e., titles that would not have been purchased individually had they not been included in the package) are used substantially. This was the case in IDAL's selection of the EBSCO*host* databases as its core package of full-text journals. It is probably safe to say that none of the 150 academic libraries participating in IDAL previously had access to every title in the EBSCO package, nor would they have selected everything in the package in a title-by-title selection process. Regardless, use statistics clearly show that the majority of the titles included in the package are used at institutions of all types and sizes. As an interesting side note, some of the most used journals have been expensive, peer-reviewed STM journals with embargo periods. This leads one to surmise that, for high quality sources, content, even with restrictions, is more valuable than no access to content at all in a large, diverse consortium like IDAL.

As a corollary, it is increasingly common for the evaluation and selection of content packages to move out of the individual institution altogether. IDAL is a clear example of the trend toward consortial purchasing and provision of electronic resources. With IDAL's central funding from the Illinois Board of Higher Education, an individual library has a powerful incentive to consider programmatic adjustments that utilize sub-

sidized resources, when they meet core institutional needs.

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this trade-off continually and will opt to accept the loss of some autonomy for the sake of consortial economy.

Another critical need that academic libraries have for electronic resources is to support the explosion of distance learning in schools of all sizes and types. The Illinois Virtual Campus, a program to manage distance learning opportunities statewide, listed more than 2,300 courses and 26,000 enrollments in the Fall 2000 semester. Individual



academic libraries and programs, such IDAL, are being called upon to provide a level information playing field for these students. The needs of these students will be met by quality electronic resources offered from libraries or from the Web.

Library service in colleges and universities of any size, type, or location may no longer operate at optimum effectiveness with an “every ship on its own” philosophy. An individual academic library now exists in an increasingly complex web of interactions with commercial and noncommercial publishers, aggregators of electronic information, inter-institutional relationships and memberships, and consortial affiliations like IDAL. A good academic library must accumulate and deliver information resources within a vastly expanded information universe that is available to every student and faculty member. And only libraries that employ consortial affiliations wisely and well will prosper. [*End TJD*].

Research Design

IDAL selected EBSCO^{host} databases as the primary electronic, full text resources for its members. After a full year of access in-depth, individual telephone discussions were conducted with several librarians representing a cross-section of academic libraries. Interviews took place in Spring 2001, and information described herein results from a combination of formal questions and open-ended discussions. This allowed the researchers to compare associated answers while allowing for useful insight provoked through a more empirical approach. The goal of this research was to gain feedback to determine how best to serve academic libraries in the realm of full text databases and how IDAL-provided databases are utilized and perceived in relation to other aggregated full text services.

As mentioned, each library involved in this study is quite different in terms of enrollment, programs offered, and databases used prior to IDAL affiliation. Those offering insight for this research represent the following colleges and universities: University of Chicago—a large, leading research library in an urban environment with approximately 4,000 undergraduates, more than 12,000 total students, one College, four graduate divisions, six professional schools and continuing studies program; MacMurray College—affiliated with the United Methodist Church, a residential, liberal arts college with twenty-nine undergraduate majors and two graduate degrees in Education; University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign—a comprehensive, major, public university with undergraduate and graduate education in more than 150 fields of study; North Park University—an evangelical Christian university in an urban setting with approximately 2,000 students, forty undergraduate and graduate programs; Illinois Institute of Technology—a private Ph.D.-granting university with programs in engineering, science, psychology, architecture, business, design and law; Northwestern University—a leading private research university with more than 16,000 students enrolled in the University’s twelve colleges and schools; College of DuPage—the nation’s largest single campus, publicly-supported, comprehensive community college located in Chicago’s western suburbs.

Stability of Content

Every librarian whom we surveyed cited stability of content as an important quality for a full text database. ‘Stability of content’ refers to the ability of a full text database to maintain existing titles. Julie Borden, Electronic Research Services Librarian for Northwestern University, called stability of content a “main factor for renewals.” The unfortunate fact is that some databases have lost hundreds of full text journals as a result of publishers deciding not to renew licenses with database vendors. A common reason for this database content turmoil (cited by publishers) is the database vendor’s inaccurate representation of full text resources as they correlate to equivalent print and e-journal formats.

Mary Jo Thomas, Director of Henry Pfeiffer Library at MacMurray College, an IDAL member, comments, “One of the biggest concerns librarians have with database aggregators is that the content that is available today may not be available next week.

The IDAL-provided databases are remarkably stable in this area, with consistency of journal availability. Even though we do not pay for this access (as members of the IDAL group), I strongly encourage our students to use the IDAL full text databases over the full-text electronic product we do pay for—because of the quality and stability of the full text titles included.”

According to Jim Mouw, Acquisitions Librarian and Electronic Resources Officer for the University of Chicago Libraries, “Stability of content is a real concern. Academic libraries need certainty in backfile and current holdings.” Dr. Sohair Elbaz, Dean of Libraries for the Illinois Institute of Technology concurs with Mouw, stating, “What I’m looking for in a full text database is stability. We must be able to count on a database to provide a journal today, and have that same journal available two years later.” Elbaz adds, “Database vendors like EBSCO are offering a major advantage if they can continue to offer stability of full text content. In addition to IDAL provided resources and other non-IDAL services, we use a particular full text psychology database. In a lot of cases, this full text aggregator hasn’t informed us of titles that have been discontinued, and we’ve been forced to constantly monitor the discontinued journals in their databases.”

Vendor Communication

As Dr. Elbaz points out, although information may not be readily apparent on database coverage lists, it is those titles that have been halted unnaturally in databases (at the publisher’s request) that are causes of concern and should be examined. The following chart depicts information that is being analyzed by IDAL as they consider the renewal and possible upgrade of existing resources. This analysis was conducted on October 18, 2001 with information derived from *www.epnet.com*; *www.proquest.com*; and *www.gale.com*.

This lack of communication by vendors continues to pose problems for academic librarians. As turmoil (full text titles halted or removed completely by publishers) appears with greater frequency in many full text databases, libraries find it increasingly more difficult to maintain complete collections. Sally Anderson, Head Reference Librarian for North Park University (an institution serving 1,800 FTE), notes that she uses an academic full text product in addition to the resources offered through IDAL. “The

Chart 1

Database	(A) Total # of Full Text Titles	(B) Unnaturally Halted Full Text Titles	(C) Ceased Naturally or Changed Names	(D) Total Active Full Text Titles A-(B+C)
Academic Search Elite	1,530	5	143	1,382
Academic Search Premier	3,175	10	210	2,955
Expanded Academic ASAP	1,741	169	173	1,399
Periodical Abstracts Research II	1,277	147	73	1,057
ProQuest Research Library	1,700	197	104	1,399

database we used prior to IDAL was excellent until a few years ago—possibly related to a company merger, and consequent service deterioration. We are very pleased with IDAL’s choice for full text databases. The main reason we continue to use the other database is that its pre-selected subheadings for subject headings facilitate searching when students approach a very broad topic.”

Embargo Periods

One concern that was raised by several Illinois librarians is vendor “disclosure practices” with regard to embargo periods. Many full text journals in aggregated databases have embargo periods. This means that the publisher requires the aggregator to delay the release of full text for a particular journal for a specific period of time. The length of embargo periods varies by publisher and by publication, but tends to range from three months to a full year. Embargoed sources in databases tend to be the highest quality, most expensive journals available in full text databases. EBSCO, the full text database vendor selected by IDAL, chooses to display this information as a component on the coverage lists of academic databases, as it is very important to subscribing libraries. Thus, when institutions select databases, and manage collections, all vital information pertaining to these full text databases is available to them, including coverage dates (both full text and indexing and abstracts), ISSN, Publisher, Peer-Reviewed status, etc. Just because a journal is not listed (by some vendors) as having an embargo period, it does not necessarily mean that the publisher has not levied an embargo. For example, the journal *Science* is found in many full text databases with a mandatory one-year embargo. However, most aggregators do not provide this information on their title lists.



Publisher Concerns

It has always been EBSCO's position that full text databases should be viewed as a complement (not a replacement) to the core print and electronic journal collections in academic libraries. As publishers have experienced cancellations of current (print or online) journal subscriptions due to the inclusion of their content in other companies' aggregated databases, they have halted or embargoed their content in these databases. Janet Fisher, associate director of Journals Publishing at MIT Press, expressed that the issue caught her attention when enough librarians said they had canceled print subscriptions because the journal appeared in an aggregated database. This is cause enough for Fisher to re-evaluate the inclusion of MIT Press journals in these products—and her reservations are echoed by a growing number of publishers.⁴

EBSCO has communicated these issues to its customers as examples of the dangers of canceling subscriptions in favor of aggregated databases. Paula Watson, EBSCO^{host} customer through IDAL, and Director of Electronic Information Services at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, strongly states, "Journal cancellation is not an issue for us. We do not rely on aggregated databases to replace print or e-journal subscriptions."

Quality of Content

Another recurring theme in nearly every discussion with IDAL members was the importance of quality content in full text databases. This was relayed in two basic ideas—quality sources that should be included; and those sources deemed inappropriate for academic collections. Overwhelmingly, librarians surveyed cited peer-reviewed journals as an initial indicator of quality. Sally Anderson, Head Reference Librarian at North

Park University, said, "For academic research through databases, we rely heavily on scholarly, peer-reviewed journals." Dr. Elbaz agrees, stating, "We only focus on full text peer-reviewed journals. The more peer-reviewed content included in

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full text databases, the better." In his March 1998 article in *Science Communication*, Juan Miguel Campanario agrees, offering that the reason we trust journal quality rests on the process by which manuscripts are evaluated before publication; that is, the peer review system. Typically, two or more reviewers assess the soundness of a manuscript's ideas and results, its methodological and conceptual viewpoint, its quality, and its potential impact.⁵

The following chart is a depiction of peer-reviewed journals in full text databases that is being used by IDAL as a factor in evaluating databases for school year 2001/2002. It is important to note the difference between total peer-reviewed full text on the one hand, and the number of still active peer-reviewed full text titles on the other. This information was taken from *www.epnet.com*, *www.proquest.com*, and *www.gale.com* on October 18, 2001.

Chart 2

(D) Total # of active full text peer-reviewed journals [A - (B+C) = D]

(C) Titles in "A" that have naturally ceased or changed names

(B) Titles in "A" unnaturally halted by publishers

(A) Total # of full text peer-reviewed journals

Database	(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)
Academic Search Elite	999	4	49	946
Academic Search Premier	2,328	7	62	2,259
Expanded Academic ASAP	845	124	20	701
Periodical Abstracts Research II	*	*	*	*
ProQuest Research Library	669	106	13	550

* As of the date of this study, the ProQuest web site does not identify peer-reviewed journals within Periodical Abstracts Research II.

The flip side to peer-reviewed journals is the contrasting inclusion of inappropriate titles in full text databases. In other words, assuming that “academic” databases contain only scholarly materials may be a premature conclusion. With obvious irritation, Jim Mouw of the University of Chicago commented, “there is a problem when a database includes 5,000 titles, of which 300 might be meaningful for academic use. My favorite example is *Ranger Rick*.” Other Illinois librarians with whom we spoke mentioned that they were frustrated by the fact that some database vendors include hundreds of inappropriate full text titles such as: *Radio Control Car Action* and *Humpty Dumpty’s Magazine* in their “academic” database.

Although the general consensus of those surveyed was that peer-reviewed content is of utmost importance, it is interesting to note preferences and needs of individual libraries. For business databases, Sally Anderson of North Park University expressed her desire for “A mix of both trade magazines and scholarly business journals.”

Linking and Searching

Analyzing the growing popularity and importance of linking as it applies to research tools, in the opening statement of their November 2000 article in *Online*, Carol Tenopir and Jill E. Grogg state that the holy grail for content providers and users alike is a seamless, integrated, transparent network that allows searchers to link quickly and painlessly to any document they seek. Users want easy access to full text, and content providers are continually breaking new ground in their attempts to give users what they want.⁶

University of Chicago’s Jim Mouw echoed their sentiment, offering, “Linking is very high on our list of importance. One of, if not *the* greatest value of aggregated

databases is their ability to provide links to full text from licensed databases." Links are valuable facilitators in working with licensed databases such as *CINAHL*, *PsycINFO* and *Sociological Abstracts*. They can also tremendously enhance research by seamlessly interacting with a library's OPAC's or e-journal collections. As full text periodical databases are often looked upon as a primary reference tool in academic libraries, it makes sense for these databases to also act as the catalyst or "hub" for linking. Thinking in this vein, aggregators are providing more and more linking capabilities as Tenopir and Grogg suggest. EBSCO offers a myriad of linking capabilities dubbed EBSCO *SmartLinks*, which have played a large role in increasing the value of the (nearly thirty) licensed databases offered through EBSCO*host*. To this accord, Sally Anderson commented, "I was so impressed with the searching and linking capabilities of the EBSCO databases, we even changed over all of our licensed databases."

An interesting point of contention was raised when distinguishing between a librarian's perception of a full text search service and a student researcher's view of the same resource. In her April 2001 article in *Searcher*, Amelia Kassel points out that it goes without saying that professional searchers think differently from the patrons, clients, or the end users whom they serve.⁷ As this relates to searching—is keyword better than

subject, or vice versa? The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has several ways to access periodical information, using IDAL-provided databases as well as selected others. Paula Watson from this library is accustomed to subject searching her non-IDAL provided databases. She comments, "With the EBSCO*host* interface, subject

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searching may need to be brought more to the forefront." She continues saying, "Most undergraduates choose broad topics for papers. Subject heading searches facilitate gathering and sorting of relevant information." But she adds, "Then again, better access to subject searching in the interface may, in fact, be more of a librarian's issue than a student preference." And Anderson said, "In the age of the Internet generation, students are most certainly keyword searchers." Thus this debate hinges primarily on preference.

Tenopir and Ennis note that expectations and attitudes have changed for both librarians and users.⁸ Their article depicts a variety of viewpoints and the need for proper instruction, regardless of the resource utilized. The authors suggest that instruction must have several aspects, including critical examination of the accuracy and reliability of content, search strategies for Boolean logic and relevance ranking systems, and the ability to deal effectively with a variety of interfaces and systems.⁹ Dr. Elbaz of the Illinois Institute of Technology suggests that she understands this need to effectively deal with a variety of search systems, commenting, "We have 2,000 undergraduate students and 4,000 graduate students. We offer access to seventy-seven different databases." She elaborates, offering, "We would like a large database that covers specific areas in great



detail. This way, students can use one search engine and one step to access this vital information.”

This idea of an enormous database covering all subjects in tremendous detail may be splendid to imagine, however difficult or impossible for vendors to maintain. There are, indeed, “Mega” databases available, but lacking in areas of major concern such as percentage of peer-reviewed full text content. Thus *linking* offers the most viable option for this ‘utopian’ search environment. And it is the components being linked that must be appropriately addressed. Mouw summarized, stating, “Companies such as EBSCO that offer sophisticated linking capabilities, as well as scholarly full text databases with thousands of peer-reviewed full text journals, are leading the way.” With these linking capabilities, a single search system allows users to access a variety of databases from a single interface.

Customization and Statistics

Although this single search interface acts as a common searching point for a multitude of electronic resources, it must still offer options for searching. Therefore, as Tenopir and Ennis mention, librarians must still find the best resource and searching features for every researcher and each question, but can do so from a single access point.¹⁰ Thus, it is best for librarians and users alike to have search options available to them. This topic naturally segues into the ability to customize electronic reference resources. This customization is a critical element in adapting resources to meet the differing needs of individual libraries, and falls into the categories of content and software functionality with equal importance. Tripp Reade’s February 2001 article in *Computers in Libraries* alludes to the fact that customization is not simply a matter of better customer service, but of control as well—control over information—and librarians must scrutinize these resources as a priority for users.¹¹

Customization and administrative capabilities can include such features as the ability to select default screens (basic, expert, etc.), add local notes and holdings information (in addition to OPAC and ILS linking), choose number of items displayed on result list, select detailed vs. basic result display, utilize multiple retrieval options, include web links, incorporate options for document delivery and forms for interlibrary loan, choose on-screen search limiters and expanders, include personalization options for individual users, initiate alert functionality, etc. However, the degree to which libraries use these administrative components varies greatly. Paula Watson said that the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign used the administrative module of the IDAL-provided full text databases to configure their library’s profile upon implementation. Sally Anderson from North Park University uses the administrative component to “add individual journals to holdings information, change note fields, generate statistical reports, etc.” However, all IDAL members expressed a need for customization in general, with an importance placed on the ability for a library to easily access detailed usage statistics.

Guidelines for Statistical Measures of Usage of Web-based Indexed, Abstracted, and Full Text Resources is set forth by the International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC).¹² The following is offered by ICOLC as an introduction to this document:

The use of licensed electronic information resources will continue to expand and in some cases become the sole or dominant means of access to content. The electronic environment, as manifested by the World Wide Web, provides an opportunity to improve the measurement of the use of these resources. In the electronic arena, we can more accurately determine which information is being accessed and used. Without violating any issues of privacy or confidentiality, we can dramatically enhance our understanding of information use.¹³

Viewing usage statistical reports as a necessity, Watson commented, "We use the administrative module for the IDAL-provided databases on an ongoing basis and they are detailed and simple to access." Anderson notes that a chart was created outlining the usage statistics of all of the electronic resources used in the North Park University library. "IDAL provides us with *Academic Search Elite*, which our statistics show is unequivocally the most used electronic resource in our library." It is a long-standing debate, however, concerning the statistical measurements deemed necessary and important for electronic databases to provide. Vendors such as EBSCO are working closely with ICOLC and other "standards" organizations in order to provide the most complete and useful representations of the usage of full text databases, in both individual libraries and across a consortium. These statistical measures are an effective means for gauging the value of consortia-provided resources.

Customer Support and Database Enhancements

In discussing IDAL-provided databases with selected librarians, it was noted that, when first implemented, these resources were largely considered "supplemental" and not looked upon as replacements to existing databases. In fact, prior to exposure to the IDAL resources, the majority of librarians whom we surveyed would have chosen another product. This general consensus was due to two main factors—unfamiliarity with newly acquired resources and uncertainty surrounding the permanence of IDAL itself. Studying the statistical measurements of the usage of IDAL-provided resources may lead to an increase in value of these resources, based on merit. Jim Mouw commented, "We use a wide range of electronic reference resources not provided through the consortium. We haven't changed anything (electronic resources) in our library because we weren't sure of the longevity of IDAL. But the longer it goes on, we will need to investigate and analyze our subscriptions to these other databases." Anderson noted that North Park University Library maintains their non-IDAL database because they are not paying for the resources provided through IDAL. "Statistics show that the database provided by IDAL is most used in our library, therefore it is justified to say that if we were to choose between the IDAL-provided resources and those previously used in the library, we would stick with IDAL. However, at this point, we are not forced to choose."

These comments reflect the increasing acceptance and reliance upon these resources as librarians and users become more familiar with them. However, it is the quality of resources, as well as service and support offered by the consortium and participating vendor that helps first to instill the confidence in these resources that eventually leads to familiarity. Denise Cote, Reference Librarian from the College of DuPage Library,



said, "The database services through IDAL have been exceptionally good. I often call in and reach someone on the first try, and if I don't, I get a call back the same day. Furthermore, I have two places to call if I have a service issue—IDAL, or the IDAL database vendor, directly." Thus, over and above providing resources, consortia sometimes offer a layer of service and support in addition to that of the vendor, which increases the value of this body.

Yet, in addition to customer service and support, according to IDAL members, databases must incorporate regular enhancements to both software functionality and content. Stagnancy was determined to be a factor in librarians' deteriorating confidence in a given resource. In light of the loss of many full text sources in the non-IDAL databases used at the Illinois Institute of Technology, Dr. Elbaz commented, "Any peer-reviewed full text additions, especially in the field of engineering, tremendously increase the value of a database in our library." Mouw noted, "The IDAL provided resources have grown steadily. By making journals available in these databases that are not available as e-journals, the library and its users experience a great benefit." Furthermore, as detailed in the May 15, 2001 *Library Journal* article, the IDAL-provided databases are currently undergoing an in-depth backfile expansion that will bring PDF coverage of 250 top peer-reviewed journals back to 1985.¹⁴ On this topic, Mouw noted, "A detailed archive would be of great value, and PDF (as opposed to ASCII) is the only way to go." Tom Dorst, IDAL Director, noted that the consortium is also looking into the possibility of upgrading to the expanded version of the database currently provided by IDAL. This database will bring 300 journals (in PDF) back as far as 1965.¹⁵

Summary and Conclusion

IDAL created an evaluation committee that conducted a thorough evaluation on behalf of the academic libraries in the state of Illinois. Consequently, IDAL exposed these libraries to resources that in many cases would not have received a thorough evaluation at the individual library level. As understood through this investigation, important factors that need be addressed in evaluation and during use of databases include: content stability; proper vendor communication regarding new, halted and embargoed coverage; amount of peer-reviewed coverage; inclusion of only appropriate (scholarly) sources; sophisticated and inclusive linking functionality; diverse searching capability; various customization options; statistical reporting capabilities; strong customer support from vendors; and regular product enhancements.

A significant underlying current throughout these discussions is the impact that IDAL-provided databases have on existing full text databases held in each library.

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Depending upon the stability and longevity of an individual consortium and the databases chosen by that consortium, libraries may seek to address other needs with the funding previously used for 'similar' resources. Although allocating funds in this manner may seem appropriate, the existing resources must be scrutinized to determine their degree of necessity as well as the quality information lost in making such a decision. In the case of IDAL, libraries finding that these consortium-provided resources are the most used in their library may have an easier decision than those finding that these resources are supplemental to existing databases, and that none are expendable. In that EBSCO's databases provide the most full text, peer-reviewed sources as evidenced herein, IDAL members may sit in an advantageous position. However, these collection decisions cannot be taken lightly, and oftentimes more than a single year of statistical usage reporting is necessary to act appropriately. For IDAL affiliates facing this concern, the upcoming year may prove to be the testing ground necessary to make these difficult choices.

As mentioned previously, before exposure to these IDAL-provided resources, each of the librarians surveyed would have chosen a different full text resource. However, throughout the course of the first year of IDAL service, each librarian, at a minimum, recognized the value of these resources and the benefit afforded their end-users through the consortium's purchase. Several found that the IDAL-provided full text databases became the most used electronic resource in the library. In the case of IDAL, a consortium purchase of full text databases seems to have been a success.

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Notes

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