

Czech Republic & Academic Research Databases

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Abstract:

Universities in Czech Republic have access to large amounts of quality information through online full text databases. Specific details regarding the world's two most comprehensive full text research databases, Academic Search Premier and Business Source Premier are provided. The paper examines which databases are strongest in each discipline, and covers issues such as the availability of journals most-cited, full text formats, peer-review status, embargo periods, backfiles, and other important facets. Additional information depicts reasons for tremendous increase in the availability of information in the Czech Republic, and the value that these resources bring to researchers in universities.

The largest increase in the availability and dissemination of journal and other reference information has occurred over the last 3 years. Much has contributed to this widespread growth, including the advent of super-databases, and the surge in research conducted as a result of their availability [1, p. 3]. The full text scholarly information available in these databases represents the basis for the exponential growth in available materials in Czech Republic and other countries around the world. These databases provide access to literally thousands of the world's most highly regarded journals and other critical research sources. With the tremendous enhancements made to these databases in recent years, examining these scholarly databases provides valuable insight for any researcher seeking information on any scholarly topic. Though the following focuses mainly on content enhancements, the power of important and improved components such as software functionality, usability, speed, and accessibility should not be overlooked. The Internet provides the means to transfer huge amounts of data, but it is the very nature and source of that information which depicts its value and validity as an academic research tool. The databases described in detail herein offer access to not only a huge amount of information, but data that is important, and increasingly necessary for academic research in all parts of the world, and relevant to virtually every subject area.

Much of the progress that has been realized by researchers in Czech Republic and all around the globe may be attributed to a surprisingly large quantity and quality of full text journals in both the hard sciences (STM) and soft sciences (humanities, social sciences, business, etc.). Just a few years ago, there were very few full text physics journals available via these aggregated databases. Today, however, there are nearly 100 physics journals available in PDF in EBSCO's Academic Search Premier (ASP), and this number is growing. Physics is only an example of the many subject areas within the realm of hard sciences that has experienced a great influx of new content made available to researchers via ASP. What was primarily a soft sciences database in previous years, ASP is now a combination of some of the world's finest journals in both the soft and hard sciences.

ASP coverage is particularly strong in the biological sciences, chemistry & chemicals, communications & media, computer science, education, engineering, environmental studies, history, language & linguistics, medical sciences, philosophy, physics, politics & political science, psychology & psychiatry, religion & theology, and sociology & social work. Holding the distinction as the world's largest collection of academic full text journals in both the hard and soft sciences categories, ASP is the most-used research tool in hundreds of universities across dozens of countries. As the database continues to grow in content, it continues to gain momentum as the most widely used multi-disciplinary academic reference resource.

Currently, every university library in Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Poland, Russia and many other nations in Central & Eastern Europe are accessing ASP, and the usage statistics in many of these countries are amazing. All Czech Republic universities are fully authorized users of this database, which can be accessed from university libraries and from appropriate remote locations. In the United States, it is not uncommon for a university to spend in excess of \$2,000,000 per year on their journal subscriptions. Even with such vast collections of journal material, these libraries commonly find it necessary to subscribe to Academic Search to complement their collections. For libraries in Central & Eastern Europe with less flexible budgets, the need for such a database is vital. The purpose of full text databases is not to replace existing subscriptions; it is to bring many new sources into the library at a reasonable cost. As depicted recently in the Johns Hopkins University Press publication, *portal: Libraries and the Academy*, Paula Watson, an Academic Search customer and Director of Electronic Information Services at the University of Illinois – Champaign/Urbana, states, "Journal cancellation is not an issue for us. We do not rely on aggregated databases to replace print or e-journal subscriptions"

[2, p. 50]. Further emphasizing the point that full text databases are not a replacement for individual journal subscriptions, a November 2002 article in *Against the Grain* offered unmistakably that these databases are, “no substitute for journal subscriptions” [3, p. 30].

Due in part to the huge expansion of hard sciences content, ASP now has a print equivalent value of more than \$1,000,000 per year. In other words, if a library wanted to buy a subscription to every single journal available in full text in ASP, the cost for that library would be over \$1,000,000 per year. Though its availability via the World Wide Web allows the database to provide the most current information, EBSCO has tremendously expanded the backfile data available in ASP. Thus, the database provides a current and historical view of information, including full text coverage for many journals dating back into the 1960s, and in some cases as far back as the 1920s. As is always the case in EBSCO's databases, coverage for each journal is cumulative, and indexing is complete (all appropriate articles are indexed from cover-to-cover). EBSCO's search interface provides researchers with the ability to search individual journals by issue, and view a complete list of the content (articles) for each journal issue.

In many instances, universities in Central & Eastern Europe have access to a variety of journals through ASP that were never before available to them. However, and very importantly, for several reasons, this access does not represent an alternative to existing journal subscriptions. For example, the most cited journals, such as *Nature*, *Science*, *Journal of Chemical Physics*, etc. frequently come with embargo periods. This means that the publisher imposes a delay on the most current full text until a specified period of time has elapsed (typically somewhere between three months and twelve months, depending on the journal). This is done to prevent existing subscribers from canceling subscriptions, but at the same time to allow non-subscribers to have some access to these journals through the database, including current indexing and abstracts. Generally, non-subscribers find this useful because they can gain access to tens of thousands of articles (in PDF) from these critical journals, including in many cases a deep archive from the particular journal. For example, while no current full text articles are available from *Journal of Applied Physics* due to the embargo period, the database does contain PDFs for more than 13,000 articles (and growing) from this highly prestigious STM journal. Further still, through the use of linking technology provided with EBSCOhost, customers may link from the current citation information, to the full text in their e-journal collections. (Information on this topic, with regard to EBSCO's practices, etc. can be found in a *Serials Review* article published in 2002 [4].)

Embargo periods are an accepted practice, and commonly found in databases. However, not all journals have embargo periods. To the contrary, there are more than 1,700 full text journals in ASP with no embargo at all. Publishers that do not impose embargo periods are relying on libraries to maintain their subscriptions to these journals. If libraries use the databases to cancel journal subscriptions (whether titles are available with or without embargoes) the publishers will undoubtedly remove their content from the databases. This has already happened with some smaller full text databases produced by companies who did not alert all of their customers to the dangers of misusing their full text products. EBSCO has worked tirelessly to avoid much of this turmoil by informing its customers of these issues. EBSCO's Web site offers that, “this potential turmoil can likely be avoided if librarians make print and e-journal purchasing decisions independent of whether the full text of a journal is available in an aggregated full text database. Proceeding in this way should result in price and content stability within aggregated databases, ensuring that end users continue to enjoy the benefits of access to these large collections of valuable data” [5].

Academic librarians evaluating databases often may look to the total number of titles in a given database, rather than the total number of quality, appropriate journals in a database. EBSCO

offers the largest full text academic collections, but more importantly, its databases contain more peer-reviewed journals than any other database offered from competing firms. Because EBSCO is the world's largest subscription agency and shares the core business of all academic publishers (journal subscriptions), publishers have a natural reason to work with EBSCO. Participation in databases represents a secondary revenue stream for publishers. Therefore, most reputable publishers are very careful in this regard, and will not expose themselves to the possible danger associated with conducting business with vendors that do not share a financial stake in the publisher's core business. Because EBSCO is the only subscription agent who is also a full text database vendor, EBSCO experiences de facto exclusives for thousands of academic journals. In other words, due to natural market conditions, academic publishers have overwhelmingly decided that they want the exposure of EBSCO's full text databases, deciding not to work with non-subscription agents. Therefore, journals from most leading academic publishers are available uniquely from EBSCO, a trend likely to continue.

Noted previously, a simple indicator of quality of content is in the number of scholarly, peer-reviewed journals in a given database. Journals defined as 'peer-reviewed' are publications which utilize a review board of experts whose role is to scrutinize the content of all manuscripts submitted, and decipher if the content is appropriate for the journal in terms of accuracy and research value. Articles are never published in peer-reviewed journals without having been through this exhaustive process. This is a unique and often lengthy course of action, much different than that of other (non-peer-reviewed) periodicals. As a result of this additional layer of scrutiny, articles appearing in peer-reviewed journals are noted for their contribution to research. In the July 2001 issue of the *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, the article "Integration of Information Resources and Collection Development Strategy" offers insight into the value of peer-reviewed journals included in full text databases. "The quantity of peer-reviewed, or refereed, content is a simple indication of the level of scholarly materials contained in databases. Although not all scholarly content is peer-reviewed, it is certainly a good starting point when determining the validity of an academic reference resource" [6, p. 16]. These journals are not only of high quality, but also generally expensive to publish, therefore usually expensive to purchase as well. ASP is the only way for many libraries to be able to afford to bring a number of these scholarly journals into their institutions, to complement their existing journal subscription base, and provide the most advantageous research environment for students.

ASP contains 2,720 full text peer-reviewed journals as of January 2003. Not only is this a large number available in an aggregated database, but it gains further significance when coupled with the fact that no other database has as many as 1,000 full text peer-reviewed journals.

PDF has emerged as the overwhelming format preference for viewing full text documents in academic libraries. Because of this, EBSCO is using PDF as the primary full text format for academic journals (including STM and soft sciences) and business journals. With these publications, EBSCO tries as often as possible to provide a native (searchable) PDF. PDF has been selected as the standard for these publications because this format is needed to properly display scientific formulas, equations, diagrams, charts, graphs, clinical images, etc. EBSCO is offering many more journals in PDF and more native PDFs than other database vendors. Not only does PDF maintain an article as it originally appeared, but many "prefer PDF files for printing because of their image quality and because they maintain the print version's layout" [7, p. 34]. Further to this, accessing PDF documents requires the use of a viewer that is freely available. In providing this type of full text format, EBSCO is in compliance with the guidelines set forth by the International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC), which offer that utilizing, "freely available plug-ins is preferred practice" [8].

Because EBSCO makes it a point to provide databases with international significance, another valuable quality that is attributed to ASP is its ability to provide full text journals (most often in PDF) for journals published outside of the United States. Most full text databases offer very limited coverage from non-U.S. publications. As of October 2002, ASP contains 1,731 full text journals published outside the United States, with the great majority (1,350) coming from three countries: United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Germany. There are some journals available from countries further in the East, including more than a dozen from Czech Republic, Slovenia, Estonia and Poland. This is significant because other full text databases contain no scholarly journals from this region. Journals published in Czech Republic and made available in ASP include *New Presence: The Prague Journal of Central European Affairs* (published by Martin Jan Stransky) and *Perspectives: Central European Review of International Affairs* (published by Ustav Mezinarodnich Vztahu). EBSCO plans to continue to expand its base of international coverage in previously mentioned areas, and other countries all over the world.

Business Source Premier (BSP) is the largest full text business database in the world, with full text available for more than 2,800 periodicals. This database also offers an unprecedented number of full text journals from outside the United States. BSP contains 910 full text journals published outside the United States, with the great majority, 749, coming from three countries: United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Germany. In addition, full text business journals are provided from Czech Republic, Switzerland, Belgium, France, Norway, and Slovenia. Country economic reports included in the database are provided by EIU: Economist Intelligence Unit, CountryWatch Incorporated, and ICON Group International. EBSCO plans to continue to expand its coverage in these areas, while seeking to license quality business publications published in other countries that traditionally have not been available in aggregated full text collections. Currently BSP provides coverage of Czech Republic journals including *Prague Business Journal* (published by New World Publishing) *Czech Business & Trade* (published by P.P. Agency) and *Czech Industry* (published by P.P. Agency).

As content additions continue to mount at an extraordinary rate, BSP provides deeper coverage in key areas such as accounting, economics, finance, management, marketing, MIS, POM, and public administration. In fact, BSP is the only way that universities can gain institution-wide electronic access to many of the leading journals in these disciplines, including *Harvard Business Review*, which is available in PDF in the database with cumulative coverage dating back to its first issue in 1922. *Harvard Business Review* is among the most cited and most prestigious business journals in the world, and unlimited access to this journal is available to all Czech Republic universities.

Though the amount of quality current information is a tremendous advantage associated with ASP and BSP, extensive work also has been (and will continue to be) done to expand the full text archival data that is made available through these databases. In mid-2001, EBSCO made the decision to move forward with an unprecedented plan to create greatly expanded backfiles for academic journals in its full text products. There are two separate initiatives in the project, which have equipped researchers with a retrospective file with which to conduct extensive research. This new backfile data, coupled with ongoing coverage provides an opportunity for users to gain insight into subject matter ranging from current references to an historical look at appropriate research material in a myriad of subject areas. This deep and wide coverage is a great benefit to faculty and students, and provides a perfect atmosphere for thorough research of a particular topic.

The first backfile expansion initiative undertaken by EBSCO is called the Business Source Backfile Initiative (BSBI). In conducting research for this project, EBSCO used journal ranking studies, reports depicting the most-cited publications, periodical usage statistics, and direct

feedback from some of the world's most prestigious business schools (librarians and professors) to create a list of the 300 top scholarly business journals published. Then, EBSCO partnered with several large universities in New England, New York and Pennsylvania (including Wharton and Cornell) to obtain the back issues for all of these titles back to 1965 or the first published issue (whichever is more recent). The goal was to create the deepest indexing and abstracting backfiles available for the world's best business journals to be made accessible in EBSCO's comprehensive business index: Business Source. In addition, because EBSCO is using PDF as the main format for full text in its scholarly databases, EBSCO worked with publishers to gain permission to process PDF backfiles for as many of the publications as possible. In the end, PDF rights were granted for more than 200 of these top 300 business journals. Again, PDF was chosen for this project because it is the most advantageous format for electronically representing this scholarly content, and the format preferred by the overwhelming majority of academic institutions.

A large number of journals included in the backfile project are actually expanding beyond 1965. For example, *Academy of Management Journal* is available back to 1958, *Accounting Review* to 1926, *Journal of Marketing* to 1936, etc. Publishers like these (and their editors) are excited by the fact that students and professors all over the world will be able to access not only the current PDF issues of their journals, but the full run of the journal as well. As is the case for many key journals (e.g. *Harvard Business Review*), EBSCO may provide coverage of every issue ever published for these selected journals.

Backfile expansions have been by other organizations, but often this additional data has been offered to their customers at a high cost. Particular backfile expansions undertaken by other companies are similar initiatives to EBSCO's, but on a much smaller scale. Thus, a huge advantage to the expanded backfiles that EBSCO creates is not only realized in amount and quality of the data, but in the fact that these are essentially free to all existing customers subscribing to these databases. Our decision to provide this free backfile as part of these databases is that this large one-time investment will generate in increased buyer loyalty and increased system usage. In the end, the result will be positive for EBSCO, our customers, and our publisher partners. Further still, this emphasizes EBSCO's goal of heightening the availability of information, and providing the most powerful, inclusive reference resources for the benefit of the end user. We have received a great response from customers regarding these huge content additions, and are excited to provide such a plentiful resource for archival data.

The second initiative is called the Academic Search Backfile Initiative (ASBI). This project was based on totally different criteria than BSBI. Whereas *Business Source* is designed to be the world's most comprehensive business index, *Academic Search* is built to cater to a different need. *Academic Search* is meant to act as an academic library's core periodical index, covering virtually every subject of study. Therefore, it was impossible to employ many of the measurements used in the BSBI research to determine which journals would be included. Instead, for ASBI, EBSCO relied almost entirely on our customers in order to determine which journals would be included in the project.

EBSCO's Director of Customer Satisfaction, Beth Howell explains, "We figured that the best way to select the journals was to let our customers tell us which ones they would use most. Thus, we studied the usage of full text articles that were more than three years old and identified the top journals in Academic Search based on that criterion" [9].

As mentioned, soft sciences current coverage is very strong in ASP. This is no different with regard to the retrospective coverage. ASBI titles include: *Acta Sociologica*, *British Journal of Psychology*, *British Journal of Sociology*, *Central European History*, *International Journal of*

Psychology, Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, Journal of Education, Political Science Quarterly, Journal of Genetic Psychology, Journal of International Affairs, Journal of Politics, Journal of Social Psychology, Social Forces, etc.

ASP has grown over the last few years, and now contains a tremendous collection of current coverage of the hard sciences. Similar improvements are represented in the back data now available in the database. Some examples of hard sciences ASBI titles include: *Addiction* (formerly *British Journal of Addiction*), *Advances in Physics*, *Annals of Internal Medicine*, *Annals of Science*, *Archives of Environmental Health*, *Astronomy & Astrophysics Review*, *BMJ: British Medical Journal*, *Contemporary Physics*, *International Journal of Environmental Studies: Sections A & B*, *Pediatrics*, etc. As always, EBSCO seeks to expand up this list through current additions of hard sciences titles.

The backfile expansion project is further outlined in the May 15, 2001 issue of *Library Journal* in an article entitled, "EBSCO Greatly Expanding Business Journal Back Files" [10]. Well over 100 journals will be on the final backfile expansion list for *Academic Search*, and all of these journals will contain an archive of indexing, abstracts and PDF files for all articles.

Both BSBI (Business Source Backfile Initiative) and ASBI (Academic Search Backfile Initiative) are near completion. More than 95% of all back issues in both initiatives are processed and currently available. Throughout 2003, the small percentage of remaining issues will be located, converted to electronic format, and provided through our databases.

EBSCO is dedicated to the constant improvement and development of databases through quality content and software enhancements, as depicted herein. The company is the leading provider of scholarly databases worldwide, largely due to its success in creating internationally significant reference resources. Furthermore, EBSCO was unanimously chosen to provide databases as part of the unprecedented project, Electronic Information for Libraries Direct (eIFL Direct), an initiative spear-headed by the Open Society Institute [11]. The database content and level of service & training that EBSCO provides in the region depicts the firm's commitment to offering the best possible resources for customers in Central & Eastern Europe, and all over the world. The company strives to constantly improve, and encourages feedback and suggestions from any library willing to offer their insight for the betterment of EBSCO's products and services.

References:

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FOOTNOTES

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