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On-line services cut research clutter



E-BIZ

JIM CARROLL

Searching the Internet can be a huge exercise in frustration. Hit a search engine, type in a phrase, and you're bound to end up with page after page of useless results.

You can overcome the problem if you learn how to conduct an effective search in a hurry. This is where you may consider paying to use one of the full-text databases accessible through the Internet — services such as Dialog, InfoGlobe/Dow Jones Interactive, Lexis-Nexis and NewsScan.

None of these services is inexpensive. But if you want to conduct research on-line in a concise manner and get quality information, you sometimes have to pay good money.

For the past several weeks, I've been using the InfloGlobe/Dow Jones Interactive service to assist with research for a book. Before you accuse me of having a biased point of view — given that The Globe and Mail is affiliated with this product — I should mention that I also had an account with its predecessor, InfoGlobe, for a few years and have long understood its strengths.

The version with the Dow Jones link, accessible through the World Wide Web, lets you access the full text of more than 6,000 news wires, magazines, newspapers and trade journals. The range of content available and the sophisticated manner by which you can search make a service such as this a powerful tool.

For example, let's say you are trying to determine the major players in the North American printing industry and want to know a little bit more about the direction they're taking. You can easily restrict your search of the service to specific printing industry publications, as this is probably the best place to find such information.

In a few seconds, you can search several years worth of publications such as Print: America's Graphic Design Magazine, Printing Impressions, Publishing & Production Executive, Publishing Technology Review, Prepress Commentary and others. That's pretty targeted research.

The articles you access won't be cheap: you're looking at several dollars apiece. But if your time is precious, you will find the exercise worthwhile because you can't easily do this type of focused research on the Web.

There are other services containing thousands of publications that are searchable in an equally sophisticated way, such as Dialog and Lexis-Nexis. Add InfloGlobe/Dow Jones Interactive and these services together, and you've got millions of articles from tens of thousands of different sources.

In addition, take a look at NewsScan, an extremely useful service that contains quite a few Canadian newspapers.

Most of these services will let you search for free once you have established an account and see the headlines from your search. You only pay for the articles you access. Keep in mind that many of these services will arrange for flat-fee usage.

If you want to find where a particular publication may exist on the Internet, check out Net.Journal Directory, an invaluable paper listing of newspapers, magazines, research journals and other publications to be found on-line.

It includes pointers to where a particular publication may be found in one of the services mentioned above. In addition, it gives you an idea of where you can locate these publications for free on-line. For each publication source, it gives you an idea of the date range that is available as well as the cost of an article. You can learn more about it at **www.hermograph.com**

Jim Carroll is co-author of Small Business Online — A Strategic Guide for Canadian Entrepreneurs, *and can be reached by E-mail at jcarroll@jimcarroll.com*