

**Would You Like a Database with That?, Or,
The Phenomena of Database-with-Textbook and Database-Coursepack Offers**

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The commercialization of information, higher education, and libraries is a topic well-known to academic librarians and faculty. Professionals concerned about these issues are faced with a daily barrage of examples of this seemingly unstoppable trend. University presidents are more and more seen as fundraisers, as are provosts and department chairs. Notions of students as customers and students as products permeate dialogue. For academic librarians, there are questions about outsourcing (whether by plan or de facto), licensing rather than purchasing (again, whether by plan or de facto), and the perceived irrelevance of print materials to students who grew up in the information age and, thus, to some who teach them. These last three issues crash together in considerations of database-with-textbook and database-coursepack offers.

This paper explores the phenomena of database-with-textbook and database-coursepack offers. Database-with-textbook offers provide faculty and students who are using a textbook from a particular publishing company access to an electronic database traditionally subscribed to by an academic library. Database-coursepack offers enable faculty to create online "coursepacks" generated from a vendor's electronic databases which students then purchase, just as they would purchase a printed coursepack at a local copy shop. In both cases, database vendors are re-purposing electronic database content and marketing it directly to faculty members – potentially removing librarians from discussions of the curricular integration of information resources, appropriate development of information literacy skills, and opportunities for classroom-library collaboration. On the other hand, such infusion of information resources into the curriculum may accomplish the learning outcomes envisioned by resource-based learning theorists. This paper discusses potential implications of these direct-to-faculty approaches, both positive implications and those that may be less so.

The Phenomena

Before exploring the implications of the database-with-textbook and database-coursepack offers, it will be helpful to review some of the more prominent initiatives that vendors are undertaking. In many cases, campus faculty are already more aware of these initiatives than librarians may be, because the faculty are receiving direct marketing materials (e.g.,

desk copies of textbooks/databases, flyers, email messages, and the like) from the vendors, as well as seeing these products in the exhibits halls at professional conferences.
Database-with-Textbook

Thomson Learning (<http://www.thomsonlearning.com>) and Pearson Education (<http://www.pearsoned.com>) will serve as the examples of the database-with-textbook approach.

Thomson Learning is a division of The Thomson Corporation. Academic librarians will recognize that The Thomson Corporation is also the parent of Gale Group, which produces the InfoTrac family of databases. Over 400 titles in the Thomson Learning higher education catalog (<http://e-catalog.thomsonlearning.com/1501>) include a note that the textbook comes "with InfoTrac." Interestingly enough, the price of a given textbooks appears to be the same whether one selects the version "with InfoTrac" or the "Non-InfoTrac Version" (though both versions may or may not be listed for any given title). The InfoTrac database which is included with the textbooks is identified as "InfoTrac College Edition" – a version not list on the Gale Group website (<http://www.gale.com>) though one can presume that the same content is available in one or more of the other InfoTrac databases offered to libraries.

As an example, InfoTrac College Edition is described as follows in the description of *American Government, 8th Edition* (ISBN: 0-534-57105-0):

NEW! The latest news and research articles online, updated daily and spanning four years! InfoTrac College Edition is automatically packaged with every new student copy of this text. You and your students will have 4-month's free access to an easy-to-use online database of reliable, full-length articles (not abstracts) from hundreds of top academic journals and popular sources.

A March 2001 "Dear Professor" letter which marketed the textbook *Learning Success; Three Paths to Being Your Best at College & In Life, 3rd Edition*, included the following note:

P.S. This edition includes four months of FREE access to ***InfoTrac® College Edition!*** This valuable resource gives you and your students access to the latest news and research articles online—updated daily and spanning four years!

Pearson Education provides another example of a textbook publisher offering database access. Librarians will recognize many of the imprints of Pearson Education which include Addison Wesley, Allyn & Bacon, Longman, and Prentice Hall. In November 2000, Pearson Education announced that it was partnering with EBSCO Information Services "to develop customized online research collections providing access to content from selected academic journals and other high quality publications"

(<http://www.pearsoned.com/pr/110600a.htm>). The resulting product is EBSCO ContentSelect Research Database (<http://contentselect.pearsoned.com>). Again, though one can presume that similar content is available through the EBSCO databases offered to libraries, the ContentSelect Research Database is not listed on the EBSCO Publishing/EBSCO Information Services website (<http://www.epnet.com>).

The ContentSelect Research Database (<http://contentselect.pearsoned.com>) is described as follows:

Exclusive to instructors and students using Pearson Education textbooks, the ContentSelect Research Database gives students instant access to thousands of academic journals and periodicals from any computer with an Internet connection! Starting the research process has never been easier.

In addition to database access, the ContentSelect Research Database also offers extensive instructional materials for students (http://contentselect.pearsoned.com/whats_new.html) on *Writing the Research Paper*, *Research Writing in the Disciplines*, *Avoiding Plagiarism* and *Citing Your Sources*.

The ContentSelect Research Database tagline is "The Easiest Way to Start a Research Paper!"

Database-Coursepack

XanEdu (<http://www.xanedu.com>) represents the other type of database re-purposing – the database-coursepack. XanEdu is an initiative of the ProQuest Company (<http://www.proquestcompany.com>), parent of the ProQuest® Online Information Service which is known to academic librarians as the vendor of ProQuest databases.

The XanEdu mission (http://www.xanedu.com/about_mission.shtml) reads, in part:

A collection of innovative online content and services created expressly for students, faculty, and higher education institutions...offering both core courseware content and tools for creating customized web and print course materials.

The discussion of the benefits of XanEdu (http://www.xanedu.com/about_benefits.shtml) states:

XanEdu is about empowering people. We give faculty the resources they need to spend less time gathering and delivering information, and more time teaching. We give students the tools they need to do research, access course materials and significantly reduce the amount of time spent finding what they need. All at a price that's comparable or, in most cases, less than traditional methods.

Since it is probably not immediately obvious from these statements exactly what XanEdu provides, a short description may help. Through XanEdu, faculty members can create online coursepacks by selecting materials from ProQuest databases and other resources. (The list of titles included is at http://www.xanedu.com/webtour/cp_titles.html.) Students then purchase the coursepacks either online or through their campus bookstores.

In addition to online coursepacks built from ProQuest database content, XanEdu also markets database subscriptions directly to individuals (<http://www.xanedu.com/researchengine/students/index.shtml>) though with pricing significantly less expensive than that of Questia.com (<http://www.questia.com>). XanEdu is also working in partnership with Blackboard Inc. to embed XanEdu content in the Blackboard Learning System course management program (http://company.blackboard.com/partners/display_partner.cgi?tid=70).

XanEdu uses the tagline "Utopia for the Mind."

Benefits to Academic Library Users

At this point, many academic librarians may find it difficult if not impossible to focus in on what might be the benefits of these products to academic library users. However, before going on to discuss concerns about these products, it is worthwhile to review their positive aspects.

Perhaps the easiest benefit to perceive is the breadth of resources that these products may open up for library users. Particularly with respect to some of the more unique, esoteric, or discipline-specific materials provided in XanEdu, library users may find materials that are otherwise not accessible to them, especially at smaller academic libraries. Regardless of library size, it is also likely that users will find a number of things in electronic format that their libraries only provide in print. In addition, for librarians who have found their efforts at a e-reserve service cumbersome, time-consuming, and inefficient in the eyes of faculty, XanEdu's online coursepacks may provide a more timely, easier-to-understand, and less expensive (in the sense that the royalty expense is borne by the student rather than the library) alternative.

In addition, both database-with-textbook and database-coursepack options are likely to encourage faculty to pursue pedagogical strategies more consonant with resource-based learning and information literacy. Rather than encouraging faculty to rely on a textbook alone, both options help faculty integrate "real world" information resources into courses and make it likely that students will be asked to read and evaluate information representing a variety of viewpoints and perspectives, as compared with the relatively homogenized viewpoint commonly presented in textbooks.

Faculty may also find that, even when the library has the same information, the database-with-textbook is easier for students to use. Consider, for example, these comments from a professor (received via a personal email communication in May 2001 – not from the Thomson Learning marketing materials):

Last semester I found that to be one of the big advantages of InfoTrac access for my students: they could find the articles on InfoTrac very easily, because the search routines were extremely brief. The more elaborate searching routines in <library's> databases made it much easier to get lost. Although I want the students to learn how to use the <library's> databases, I don't want complexity to get in the way of accessing course readings in the middle of the term.

For faculty who want to use multiple articles in a course, database-with-textbook offers provide a convenient and simple option for guaranteeing student access.

Finally, in an odd sort of way, these products may help librarians explain that information is expensive because they mean that faculty and students will have more personal experience in the information marketplace.

Academic Librarian Concerns

On the other hand, it is also easy to see how these products are a source of concern for academic librarians. In general, both types of products compete, either directly or indirectly, with many services that academic libraries provide and they do so using a for-profit approach and infusions of start-up capital, rather than with the non-profit service model used by academic libraries.

In developing these products, vendors appear to be capitalizing on uninformed and misinformed faculty and students. InfoTrac, EBSCO, and ProQuest databases are found in thousands of academic libraries. Why then would access to these databases be an effective marketing tool for vendors wishing to sell textbooks and coursepacks unless faculty and students are either not aware of the offerings of their libraries and/or prefer the database with which they are most familiar even if it is not the best one for their research questions?

This later issue is the one that calls into question just how much these products can actually encourage resource-based learning and information literacy as they seem more likely to create further misconceptions in users' minds instead, e.g, that one large general database is the best tool for every research topic.

Interestingly, misconceptions such as these are often used in the marketing materials for the database products. Consider, for example, this quote from a senior biology student from Harvard on the XanEdu website:

This is great to have, especially for my upper level seminar courses, where there isn't a lot of good material. It will give me the information I need; then, if something hits me, I can look to this and other resources. I would have really liked this for my History of Science course; there's absolutely no way to gather information across subjects easily.

Harvard University librarians would probably wonder at the claims in this quote and point out that they do provide access to the ProQuest Research Library among the more than 120 databases made available to Harvard students, calling into question the economy of purchasing a personal subscription.

Likewise, consider this student quotation about InfoTrac College Edition:

Thank you! I have just completed a well-received presentation in class using InfoTrac-supplied sources only. I was able to synthesize viewpoints and data from several sources and really made my classmates think deeply about the topic I had chosen.

There are some obvious concerns about whether this student is gaining research skills that will give him/her the ability to explore a variety of research questions or whether the student is developing a dependency on InfoTrac that will be a barrier to successful research in future courses.

Finally, there are concerns related to money and influence. If a faculty member is swayed in his/her thinking about which textbook is the best one to use by the fact that one textbook, though not as good on other accounts, offers database access while another one does not, students may be assigned a text that is less appropriate because of the perceived value of the database. This is all the more problematic if the database is already provided to those same students through a library subscription. Likewise, a student who is required to purchase an online coursepack from XanEdu may find him/herself purchasing information that the library has already purchased from ProQuest. Additionally, if the faculty member is using a XanEdu coursepack rather than the library's e-reserve service, the student is also being denied the opportunity to exercise his/her fair use privileges and is instead being required to pay copyright royalties.

What Could Academic Librarians Learn

The above considerations of benefits and concerns provide a good foundation for considering what academic librarians can learn from the database-with-textbook and database-coursepack initiatives.

Most fundamentally, it seems that the library's instructional efforts need to extend beyond teaching faculty and student how to use information resources to educating them about which information resources the library provides. This type of instructional outreach may be seen as marketing; however, it is marketing that goes beyond the typical "feel good about the library" campaigns and seeks to educate on specific issues and topics. It seems likely that the answer to "why don't they use the library's databases" is not that they do not know how to but that they are not even aware that the library is providing them.

Beyond the general lack of knowledge about library-provided resources, there is also the misinformation that faculty and students harbor. An example of this occurred in a campus

demonstration of XanEdu in February 2002 during which a faculty member praised the business resources in XanEdu while at the same time saying that she had previously used ABI/INFORM and did not like it. The faculty member was clearly unaware that the business resources in XanEdu and ABI/INFORM, a ProQuest database, were the same.

Interestingly, the library may actually be hampered in this educational effort by the abundance of resources that the library provides. Faculty and students may become overwhelmed by the options and the challenges of negotiating a 100+ list of databases and prefer the simplicity of a single, general, "it's in there" type of database. These emotional issues must therefore also be addressed through educational outreach and marketing.

In developing educational marketing, academic librarians might co-opt some of the techniques utilized by the database vendors. The power of branding is well-known in marketing and could be utilized easily by an academic library. A consistent, attractive tagline that brands the product is found in almost all commercial marketing campaigns. In addition to a consistent positive message, vendors are also utilizing repeated contact to remind faculty of their products. Every so often, XanEdu sends an email message to faculty which reminds them of the product and offers assistance should they want it. Finally, these vendor campaigns repeatedly emphasize ease of use and speed; however, these messages are aimed at creating a certain perception of the product rather than at providing evidence of these characteristics. Marketers capitalize on the fact that, for the user, the perception of the characteristics of the product is more powerful for encouraging use than the actual characteristics of the product are.

Vendor marketing also capitalizes on those things that faculty and students dislike about library-provided products and services. XanEdu mentions repeatedly that the materials are copyright-cleared – subtly pointing out that the lead time and delays common to library e-reserve systems are eliminated if one uses a XanEdu coursepack. Similarly, by providing each student with a personal login for InfoTrac College Edition or EBSCO ContentSelect Research Database, Thomson Learning and Pearson Education capitalize on the problems libraries have in supporting off-campus access to resources that require user-authentication. Academic librarians should, therefore, emphasize any costs associated with the database products, as cost is an obvious negative attribute in the minds of both students and faculty, and point out the cost effectiveness of using resources provided by the library, which do not have a four to six month expiration (another disadvantage of the database-with-textbook and database-coursepack initiatives).

Finally, academic librarians might reflect on a strategy straight out of the XanEdu mission statement:

XanEdu began with a simple question: "How can we make teaching and learning better for college and university students and faculty?" The company's management, editorial, and product development teams asked this question to students and professors across the United States.

The answer XanEdu reports is:

Give us access to the world's knowledge base - past and present. Make it affordable. Make it current. Make it easy for instructors to adapt and customize with original materials. Make it available anywhere and anytime students and faculty need it.

This answer seems not unlike the answer that academic librarians have heard, and heeded.

Perhaps it is not so much a matter of asking users the question as it is a matter of pointing out that academic libraries provide the best answer.