CCL-EAR Committee Review
Of Title Source II on the Web
June, 1999

The California Community College Libraries, Electronic Access to Information Resources Committee (CCL-EAR) undertook a "hands-on" study of The Title Source II on the Web. This database is published by Baker & Taylor, Inc.

The Title Source II is an extensive database which offers acquisitions information on over 2 million book, audio and video titles from U.S. publishers. In addition to the usual bibliographic data, the database contains more than 60,000 tables of contents, over 220,000 book jackets, a half million annotations and numerous keyword searchable book reviews to assist in selection. Searches of the database can be customized using approximately 40 search indexes and a very wide array of search filters (academic level, publisher status, price range, language, etc.). Information is updated daily. The database also offers ordering and tracking features for Baker &Taylor customers; B&T's future plans include options for ordering from additional vendors through the Title Source II database.

Each CCL-EAR committee member independently, or in concert with other qualified professionals on their campus library staff, reviewed and evaluated The Title Source II on the Web. Assessments were submitted on a Review Reply Form specifically designed by the Committee for this purpose. Though other staff may have helped in the review process, completion of the form was by the CCL-EAR committee member only and not transferred to another. Ratings were based upon the potential value of the proposal to the California Community Colleges as a whole and not solely on the needs of any specific campus.

Attributes of the information resource were assessed on a scale of 1 to 4 with 1 representing the "least value" and 4 representing the "most value". The following attributes were examined:

INFORMATION DATABASE
Consider its functionality, the appropriateness of format (bibliographic/full-text), the content of the information, the adequacy of coverage (retrospective, current), and its value to the California Community Colleges as a whole.

SEARCH INTERFACE
Consider the functionality and ease of use of the interface. Is it intuitive or is an excessive amount of training required? Are any crucial features missing from the search interface?

USER SUPPORT SERVICES
If documentation is required for successful use of product, is it available, comprehensive, and well written? Is online help adequate and user friendly? Does vendor supply training if it is needed? Is a telephone help line available?
COST
If cost is available, does it seem reasonable in terms of comparable products?

ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICE
Is access/connection to product reliable and stable? Is response time adequate?

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

#1 --- No Support

#2 --- No Support at this time. Future support conditional upon enhancements noted below in Comments Section.

#3 --- Support and Recommend proposal be forwarded to California Community College libraries for their acceptance or rejection. Would like to see enhancements in product noted below in Comments Section.

#4 --- Outstanding offer and opportunity. Recommend proposal be forwarded to California Community College campus libraries for their acceptance or rejection.

Following are the results of the CCL-EAR Committee's review as well as comments taken from the individual Review Reply Forms.

INFORMATION DATABASE: (3,3,4,4)

Similar in format to Amazon.com, this product's potential value would be to libraries who use Baker and Taylor as a primary vendor. Title list is extensive (2 million) and the 60,000 Table of Contents entries and annotations are assets. It is unclear if this product will replace BT Link and if it does, whether the same output can be achieved (printouts of cataloging slips, order cards, etc.) It is also unclear whether this product interfaces with OCLC's Promtcat which would set the OCLC holdings automatically. Although BT has "offered other book vendors the option of including their inventory on TSII" it is unclear how an interface with Midwest would be developed.

Title Source II consists of 1) a very rich "title-information database" containing "comprehensive information on over 2 million book, audio and video titles" from 65,000 publishers, 2) an almost
infinitely configurable search engine, and 3) an online selection and ordering system (for Baker & Taylor customers), complete with downloadable MARC records. Titles included are in print, out of print and "not yet published." Approximately 586,000 titles are currently accompanied by brief annotations, 39,000 by reviews. Other useful selection information in the database includes: complete table of contents for some titles; copies of book jackets; data on the number of times a title has been requested by other searchers, publisher availability, B&T stock availability, and more. The database is updated daily.** -----According to Title Source Tech Support, there is not yet a list of all review sources which are included in the database *full text.* The searches I did showed brief reviews from the "Horn Book" (not much use for college libraries), In some cases, brief annotations were also included from Book News, Inc in Portland, one review from Kirkus and one from Choice Outstanding Books. Most titles I saw merely listed *citations* for reviews rather than including the text of any of the reviews. Some titles' "Review Sources" page turned out to be blank; others showed only lists of mysterious alpha-numeric codes (XCG0, XRC0, ZBWC, ZC96, etc.) ** -----The Title Source II database will clearly be useful as an acquisitions tool, but to make it really useful as a selection tool, more reviews should be included full text. Librarians already have FREE access to many more reviews at amazon.com, barnesandnoble.com and with their regular subscriptions to Choice, Booklist, etc.**

I used this database to look for pricing information for approximately 60 titles. It is supposed to contain over 2 million titles with daily updates. Of the titles I searched, there were only two that were not in the database. Of the records I found, there was VERY complete information about the book. From the basics (Author, Title, Publisher), whether it was out of print, When it was due to be published, to annotations and reviews from outside sources such as Kirkus, Publisher's weekly and Choice Best Books. As a bonus, there is a picture of the book jacket for many of the titles. One could search using two modes, advanced where one used abbreviations for 36 different databases or using a template and selecting these databases in pull down windows. It was very easy to maneuver around the database using the buttons. One could also arrange the list of titles in ascending or descending order and sort by various means. The number of databases to search, the amount of information one retrieves in the record the ease of use makes this a very attractive product to consider for purchase.

The database contains a sufficient number of records, including older publications still in print and some foreign language publications. However, the total number located using a given search by BISAC code retrieves far fewer citations than BIP on CD-ROM. A number of value added enhancements easily overcome this. The currency with daily updates and availability twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week makes it attractive for faculty and students working at home. Our most recent unsolicited faculty requests were included in the database, occasionally with review sources listed. This is very useful in determining the potential value to the collection in general, of materials that have been specially requested by faculty or students.

**SEARCH INTERFACE: (2,3,4,3)**

While searches were hampered by annoying Javascript "alerts" and "errors," it is clear that this resources offers numerous options for searching the database with specialized searches designed to assist librarians with collection development. I disliked the fact that each New Search did not clear the
previous search so that I was forced to delete the previous search. This could be easily done through programming. Also, once when I logged in, the system did not default to a beginning menu but picked up where the last demo took off. I was able to review the last user's searches (Mary Oliver, Oncology, Herbal defense) The codes were not very intuitive but were easily learned (J=jacket). It was difficult to get back to the main search page and it was only through trial and error that I found the "Template" button which linked me back to the Basic Search page. Frustrating! I did like the Search by Filters capability where you could see everything in the database by a variety of options. I tried the language option and got a listing of everything in Chinese, Korean and Multilingual. I also liked the concept that you can search by review source, but since reviews are not linked, the value of this seemed questionable. Subject searching posed the greatest anomaly as one tried to decipher the rationale of the subject headings: Library subjects (Note! These seem to be unformatted LCSH; it is not clear), General subjects, Academic subjects, and BISAC subjects. A book on Monologs had the following subjects:

Library Subjects: Monologues, Acting Auditions
General Subjects: Performing Arts/Dance
Academic Subjects: Auditions Pieces
BISAC: Performing Arts/Acting and Auditioning.

The design and layout of Title Source II screens is clear and aesthetically pleasing. Aside from a few oddly named buttons and pages ("Multiple Title Display" (???) instead of "Search Results"), and a number of unexplained options in Administrator Setup ("Profile enabled?" "EDI Enabled?", etc.) buttons and labels are generally easy to understand and navigation is easily learned. ** ------ After the richness of the database itself, the power and flexibility of the TSII search engine is TSII's biggest strength. The database can be searched either by browsing an index or by any combination of about 44 different search options (Words, Title, Words--Title, Library Subjects, Words--All Subjects, LCCN, Dewey Class, ISSN, Words--Review Text, Genre, etc.). Searches can be performed either via pull-down menus for the different fields or via the quicker mode, combinations of key commands (kw=words, ti=title, kwti=keywords-title, and so forth). In addition, over 100 different "filters" (limits) can be applied to a search. So, for example, one could search for all titles with the words "recovered memory" in any field, written in English, from commercial publishers (i.e. no university press pubs), written for a community college, undergraduate or general level audience, including reviews in the TSII record, published since 1995 but excluding out of print and not yet published titles. At almost any step of any process in Title Source II, users have a number of options available in case they choose to use them.** ------ Users can set up different carts (e.g. for different selection areas) to organize and track their selections and orders. Contents can be transferred from one user's cart to another's (e.g. from a librarian's cart to the acquisitions assistant's cart). Each cart's display shows a running total of number of titles, volumes and dollars spent for that cart. Users can download MARC records for titles which are selected though it isn't clear how they would be integrated with a local acquisitions or cataloging system.** ------ The "Search History" feature is very useful if you want to go back to an earlier search. If you want to repeat the same search on a regular basis, you can save the search, then redo it from the Search History without having to reenter all your search criteria.** ------ SOME INTERFACE PROBLEMS: Half the staff computers in our library and a good number of the public ones are Macintoshes. 51% of our campus staff and faculty use Macintoshes. There are community colleges in California which are *entirely* Mac-based. But Title Source II was clearly developed for a Windows platform, and it has some significant problems running on some models of our Power Macintosh computers. For example, it is impossible to search for a phrase ("child development," "supreme court,"
etc.), and buttons required to perform an action sometimes do not appear on the screen. Why didn't B&T notice these problems in development? There's no excuse for not at least *testing* a product on all the platforms and all the browsers a developer can think of. ** ----- The system is large, and the interface feels slow and lumbering--like driving a big, heavy car that needs a tuneup. For example, it takes a couple of seconds for each new Help topic you've selected to appear on the screen. In the meantime, you're left looking at the previous Help topic you selected. ** A public module is listed in Administrator setup, but is not yet available. Libraries obviously won't want their users able to order books, so use in a public Reference setting could be problematic right now. ** There were numerous places where there seemed to be no path back to a place I'd been earlier in the search. ** Some titles clearly not yet published (e.g. year of publication = 2020) do NOT carry the "not yet published" message. Presumably this means that they won't be excluded when the "Exclude not yet published" filter is applied to a search. (Frankly, I don't feel a need to know that a book will be published 22 years from now; seems like a 5-10 year span would satisfy any curiosity about whether a new edition of a title was in the works.) ** Netscape's "The info you're sending is insecure and anyone can see it" warning pops up for every single search. It's very annoying. I know this feature can be turned off in the browser, but why is it even needed for searches (as opposed to the ordering module where a secure server is obviously needed)? ** An "Index Browse-->Review Source" search results in a list of the more than 3,000 journal issues and other sources from which reviews are drawn for the database, but you can only view 10 titles at a time, and there is no indication of which review sources are actually included *full text* in the database. ** If you need to change filters for different types of searches, the filtering process is rather cumbersome. You must click the Filters button, then set all the filters you want, then click the "Apply button," then click the New Search button, then enter your search terms, then click the Search button to get results. Why can't you just enter your search terms, set your filters, and when you click the apply button have the filters automatically performed on the search terms you already set? Although it's quite powerful and very promising, I think the search interface still needs some work.

The look of this product and the ease of using it is really wonderful. The look of the whole product is visually appealing. The advanced search screen is comparable to many other types of searches where you type in an abbreviation and use the "=" to make your search statement. It has the most common searches first and least common at the end instead of in alphabetical order. There are two search modes advanced and using a template. Both of these search results can be customized as to a multiline format (longer record) or an online format which gives just the basic results (author, title, price, format, ISBN) in a chart. Lists of results can be sorted in several ways and arranged in ascending and descending order. There were also many, many, many different ways to limit or as they say "filter" your search strategy. I used advanced and the template to look for my records and found I got better results using the template then the advanced search method. This could be because of "operator failure" I have not had good results using a command type of searching (advanced method) in other databases either! I did have some failures particularly when looking by title and title keyword and occasionally author. I would get the 0 results message for some of the books I was looking for and when I did the search a different way,(and there are so many ways) I would find the correct record. This did happen at least 10 times. But, it also could have been operator error. Although I did access my search history and it looked like I did them correctly. The buttons were easy to find and understand, good looking, and easy
to use. I liked that I did not have to use the Back button and I thought the Clear button was a good feature. The buttons were clear on where you were going and where you were. One can click on the title to go to the full record and the publisher to get addresses, etc. but the ATJ buttons were also a nice feature to take you directly to the annotation, table of contents or the book jacket. In the full record I would have preferred that the headings were in bold for publisher, subject headings etc. instead of the headings themselves. Boolean searching and truncation are available. I spent too much time using the multi-line format because I kept reading the annotations and the reviews! I would have saved a lot of time if I had used the online format. I would say I really enjoyed using the interface and doing the searches and was more than happy with the results and all the information that is available from this database.

The interface is well organized and functional. The frame organization with available function buttons on the left side of the screen is consistent throughout the product. While the screens are consistent and visually appealing, the frames limit the accessibility of those using older computers and the visually impaired. The strong search potential is available for those who prefer a menu or "key" driven search screens. An exceptionally large number of fields are searchable and an almost limitless number of involved search queries are possible. Moving from screen to screen is fairly intuitive. The addition of filters for search refinement is useful where the same limiting criteria are to be used in a number of, or all searches, for example to eliminate juvenile publications. One negative aspect is the most concise option is a page display with a maximum of 20 citations, it can be time consuming and frustrating to page back and forth through the list. Another frustration was to always be returned to the top of the title list after viewing a "Detailed Title Display" and clicking to return to the multiple display.

** USER SUPPORT SERVICES: (2,2,4,3) **

This system using the Netscape help menu to frame their online help. The Netscape menu bar should be suppressed so as not to interfere with their online help. A SEARCH box would be helpful so that one does not have to wade through every category to find what you need. I know that BT offered training and demos on site. Phone, fax and e-mail tech support appears to be available. I called the Western Service Center as linked to in the online help and was referred to another number on the east coast. I got an answering machine because all agents were busy!

This is probably the weakest aspect of Title Source II in its current state, presumably because the product is so new. Support services include: Online help instructions, a 99-page (5.9 MB) downloadable user manual (which the user can print at his/her own expense), and e-mail and telephone technical support. ** ------ Online Help is pretty skeletal and needs to be more comprehensive. Some topics are not covered in enough depth, and it is difficult to find many of the topics which are there. The top level Help menu lists only six broad topics, with no subtopics until you get to the next level. Thus, if you are trying to figure out how to do something, you often don't have any idea where to look. In addition, some topics in online Help have only one or two sentences on the page for that topic (See for example, "Executing a Search" under "Screen Overview" which contains only the less-than-helpful "After selecting the appropriate criteria on this screen, click the Search button to execute the search."). As a result, way too much clicking back and forth is required to get the big picture. It's easy to get lost
The help screens were very useful and gave me the information I needed when I was confused. You can print out the help document. The help button was context-sensitive and there was a help table of contents available. The instructions were clear and easy to follow and they also gave examples. There is a button to contact technical support through E-Mail and there is a section sort of like FAQs that you may utilize to get information.

Context sensitive help screens and a general help feature are available if somewhat uneven in scope.
The help table of contents is so brief as to be almost useless. However, the context sensitive help and "Main Search Screen" help are clearly written and easy to follow. More descriptive documentation in how best to use the many value added features (especially working with carts and system setup) and how to incorporate them into normal library workflow would be helpful. This may be provided to actual subscribers.

**COST: NO RATING**

No consortium price quote was available at the time of this review. Pricing is per user ID, with the first user being one price and additional users being separate, lower prices. When considering how many user licenses are needed at a particular library, keep in mind that the first user ID is the system administrator's, with permissions and capabilities that you wouldn't necessarily want the rest of the staff to have. More than one person can use each user ID (though not simultaneously), but if multiple users use the same user ID, they can see, add to, delete and otherwise affect the contents and features of the selection and order carts for anyone else using that ID. Optimally, each user would have his/her own user ID; pricing would determine whether or not that were possible in community college libraries.

**ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICE: (4,3,4,3)**

Good solid response time

Connection seems to be stable. I had only a few occasions where connection was refused by the B&T server and only a few Javascript error problems. There were a number of problems performing basic system functions when using Macintosh computers which prevented effective use of the system on some Macintosh computers.

I had no trouble connecting and was never kicked off the system. The response time was very good.

Connectivity was reliable and the speed usually good. Occasionally response time was somewhat slow, especially after an action had been taken. The availability of the database via the Internet seven days a week and 24 hours a day is very positive aspect of the product.

**OVERALL ASSESSMENT: (3,3,4,3)**

Of value to Baker and Taylor users, especially if it will replace BT Link.

It seems clear that this is Title Source II's maiden voyage and there is room for improvement in some areas. However, I think the system has *enormous* potential, for reference, selection and acquisitions.

**----- I really wavered between assigning TSII a 2 or a 3 rating. I finally gave the system a 3 instead of a 2 because of its huge potential and its multiple library applications, and because Baker & Taylor's long history of library service makes me trust that they will address the problems, and because for**
PC/Windows-based libraries, it's currently a useful tool for selection and acquisitions. If your library is heavily Mac dependent, I'd wait to see if B&T is able to resolve the platform problems. **-----

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS: INTERFACE: --Make publication date one of the regular search fields rather than one of the filters so that you don't have to go through the multi-step process of changing the filters just to change the publishing date on different searches. Currency is not as important in some searches (e.g. history) as in others (e.g. science & medicine). --Give web pages distinctive titles (e.g. B&T Title Source II--Search) rather than every page being titled "Baker & Taylor Electronic Business and Information Services (EBIS) Home" so that when you use Netscape's "Go" menu to return to an earlier page, the page titles listed there are meaningful and you can easily find the page to which you want to return. --Keep the "New Search" button in the same location on every page. It's annoying to have to keep stopping to figure out where it's been moved on *this* page. --When there are pages and pages of results for a search, provide a way to get back directly to an earlier page without having to click Back and Back and Back and.... Something similar to the way Web search engines put hot-linked page numbers across the bottom of search results pages could be used. --For someone who is right handed, having all the buttons, particularly the "Next" and "Previous" buttons, on the left side of the screen is annoying when you're working your way through pages and pages of search results since you have to keep crossing the entire screen to reach the Next Page button or use a new command. I'd recommend a more convenient spot for some of these, perhaps the right side of the screen. **------ USER SUPPORT: Flesh out the Online Help menu by adding subtopics under the six topics listed there so that people will be able to go more directly to a topic they are looking for. --Consider adding a keyword search tool for online Help. --Cover topics in more depth in both online Help and in the user manual. --Extend P.M. hours of technical support to accommodate West coast users, and increase staffing so that telephone support calls at least get a fairly quick response if not immediate attention. When you're in the middle of a project or a search, it's disruptive and frustrating to have to wait for people to call you back before you can proceed. 

This bibliographic utility has all the features imaginable to do many different kinds of searches, customizing them so you get the results you want. Also to make lists, get reviews of the books and make up your order to B&T all in one easy to use product.

Overall a good product with excellent potential. A few minor issues in the interface would make the product easier to use, but are not critical. It would appear that currently, the database is considerably less inclusive than BIP, which might be an issue for larger institutions. The inclusion of actual reviews, rather than only citing a source would also be a major improvement.

RATING FOR HOME CAMPUS ONLY: (2,4,3)

Our library already licenses Title Source II.

If the price is right this is definitely a product we would try to purchase.

The potential is good. Inclusion of full-text reviews would be a real selling point with us. Also, the
collection development possibilities are not entirely clear, but it would seem worth trying for a year, especially if good training or other means of identifying how best to utilize its potential were communicated to the institution.

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