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LBSC 775

July 10, 2014

ASSIGNMENT 4: SECONDARY PRODUCT EVALUATION

Introduction and List of Periodicals

Book Review Index is an indexing service owned by Gale Group Cengage Learning. The Index is available in print, as a hardcover book, and online, as a searchable database through the Gale Group website. The Index provides citation entries and full text (online only) of reviews of books, periodicals, books on tape, and electronic media. The Index pulls from over 600 publications, including American Journal of Education, Belles Lettres, Books in Canada, Children's Book News, Choice, Essence, German Quarterly, Irish Literary Supplement, Kirkus Reviews, Library Journal, Middle East Policy, Mother Jones, New York Times Book Review, Publishers Weekly, Times Literary Supplement, Village Voice, Women's Review of Books, World Literature Today, and Yale Review (Gale Cengage Learning, n.d.). This product evaluation will focus on Book Review Index online and print formats and will cover the following areas: purpose and intended users; subjects covered; adequacy of instructions for use; frequency, issues, and completeness; structure/quality of entries; authority and controlled vocabulary; cost; and overall user-friendliness.

Purpose and Intended Users

The purpose of Book Review Index, print and online formats, is to provide "quick access to reviews of books, periodicals, books on tape and electronic media representing a wide range of popular, academic and professional interests" (Gale Cengage Learning, n.d.). Because the

Index pulls from a wide variety of sources and subject areas, and users only need to know the author of the work, title of the work, or the review publication, this Index is aimed at the general public. There are very few knowledge gaps to be closed in order to use this indexing product.

Subjects Covered

As stated previously, the subjects covered in the index are various and of general interest. According to the Dialog Bluesheet (now ProQuest Sheets) for Book Review Index, the subject areas covered include social sciences, humanities, sciences, business, fine arts, and general interest (Dialog, 2008). The list of publications indexed above also shows that the subjects covered are widespread and various. This is further evidence that Book Review Index is aimed at the general public and should be organized in such a way that appeals to the lay user.

Adequacy of Instructions for Use

The print and online formats of Book Review Index include user instructions. The print format contains a user guide in each issue explaining how to view and search the index, which is especially useful as each review entry is arranged by author of the work being reviewed. However, the user instructions are very simple, as the print format does not have a very complicated structure and users can only search by author. On the other hand, the online format has a much more comprehensive user guide, which aids users in navigating the interface and search functions. According to the user guide, there are three basic ways to search the online database: by author, title, and advanced. Advanced search allows users to search by keyword, author, title, review title, publication date, journal name, full text, reviewer, illustrator, reader, refereed, publisher, ISSN, issue number, start page, and/or volume number. Users can filter all search results by date, review type, length of review, reading level of book, and publication type.

The user guide explains these options as well as provides details on search operators and how to use the dictionary feature to check the spelling of a word. However, even though the user guide is comprehensive, it is not easily located within the search interface. The additional user features will be discussed in the "user-friendliness" section below.

Frequency, Issues, and Completeness

The print format of Book Review Index is released as three issues covering the entire year and one annual cumulative edition at the end of the year. The cumulative edition is approximately 1400 pages long. The online format of Book Review Index is updated constantly and includes the entire backlog of entries from Book Review Index print formats, starting in 1965 through the present day. While the print formats only include reviews in the year it is released, which vary in length and amount, the online database has more than 5.6 million reviews on more than 2.5 million works (Gale Cengage Learning, n.d.).

Structure/Quality of Entries

The entries in the print format of Book Review Index include the author of the work, title of the work, source, date, and page. This structure can become confusing, as there are *two* authors (the original work author and the review author) and *two* sources (original work and review source). However, the "author" and "title" in the print version are of the original work, and the "source," "date," and "page number" refer to the review publication. The entries are arranged alphabetically by author of the work being reviewed. As stated previously, the content, structure, and quality of the entries in the print version of the index rely on the user to know the author of the original work; knowing the author or publication of the review will not aid users in finding relevant entries. The structure of entries in the online format is much more

comprehensive. Book Review Index Online can be integrated with any library system to provide both links to full text of the review within the library's catalog or full text within the entry itself, if the library has a subscription to InfoTrac OneFile or Expanded Academic ASAP (Gale Cengage Learning, n.d.). At the basic level, each entry has the same information as in the print index (see above); more advanced entries include the basic information *plus* reviewer name, full text of the review, price, format, reading level, number of pages, publisher, photo of the source cover, and source cover illustrator. These comprehensive entries are linked to the advanced search terms discussed above, so users have a plethora of access points to search and browse book reviews. The results also have related entries which point users to reviews of the same source, reviews written by the same reviewer, and reviews in the same publication. The one drawback to the completeness of the online format is that even though they offer full text of reviews for most entries, they are not 100% reliable, and the database suggests users to go to the original source for accuracy. Additionally, review entries in both formats do not include subject descriptors, which is uncommon for an indexing product. This is especially puzzling because books rely heavily on genre classification, and while users can access entries through reading level or type of original work, there are no options to search or filter by subject/genre.

Authority and Controlled Vocabulary

Authority control and usage of a controlled vocabulary is very different in the print versus the online formats of Book Review Index. The print format includes a list of periodicals indexed, which is used as their authority file for periodical name formatting; the authors of original sources are also listed consistently as last name, first name. This makes the print version easy to browse, as entry structure and format is consistent throughout. The online version, on the other hand, suffers from not having authority files or controlled vocabularies. While the online

version does have a dictionary button located on the side-bar, it is only a link to the online Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary so users can spellcheck search terms (not proper nouns). The online Index does not use consistent formatting, controlled vocabularies for descriptors, or an authority file. This is especially noticeable when users search for reviews by author of the original work. For example, when "Neil Gaiman" is input to the Author search bar, four different versions of his name appear: "Neil Gaiman,; Gaiman, Neil; Gaiman, Neil Richard; and Gaiman, Coraline Neil." Each of these formats have entries attached to them (all of which are reviews of Neil Gaiman novels), so it is clear that the online version does not standardize their data entry using an authority file or controlled vocabulary.

Cost

Because the cumulative print format of Book Review Index is over 1,000 pages long, it is priced at around $600 (Gale Cengage Learning, 2014). The pricing of the online format is a little more complicated, as the Gale Group owns many databases and institutions can qualify for price reductions based on the subscriptions they purchase. However, based on the pricing structure posted by the New York State Office of General Services, the base price for the most minimal access to Book Review Index Online is $774 (NY OGS, 2013). It is surprising to see how close in price one print format of Book Review Index is versus the yearly subscription cost to the online database, especially given the disparity between the number of entries in each (1400 pages vs. 5.6 million).

Overall User-Friendliness

Overall, the online format of Book Review Index is more user friendly than the print format, only because it offers a wider variety of entries and access points. The print format is

useful only if the user already knows the author of the original work, as there are no options to search by publication, keyword, reading level, or type of original work. The print version also only holds review entries for the current year; users have to find or purchase previous versions to find older reviews. Purchasing the print version is also not very cost effective, as it is barely $200 less than the online subscription. It is surprising that the print version is still being published, especially as no libraries in a 100 mile radius of Silver Spring, Maryland seem to carry the Index on their reference shelves. The online version allows users to browse millions of review entries through numerous access points. This form of searching is more appropriate for book reviews, as reviews are most useful to those who have not read the original work. However, if structure, quality, and authority/vocabulary control are more important to the user, the print version is more useful and user-friendly. While having millions of entries is a great thing, not having authority or vocabulary control makes the online Index slightly unmanageable.

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