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International Trade Data Network (ITDN)

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ADVISOR REVIEWS—STANDARD REVIEW

International Trade Data Network (ITDN)

Date of Review: March 10, 2009)

Composite Score:

★★★★

Reviewed by: Janice G. Schuster

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Pricing Options

An Educational Site License, based on the number of FTE students including both undergraduate and graduate students, is available to colleges and universities offering four-year degree programs. The rates are \$.30 per undergraduate FTE and \$.45 per graduate FTE, with a minimum annual cost of \$500 and a maximum cost of \$5,000 per each institution.

Product Description

The International Trade Data Network (ITDN) is part of a comprehensive, full-service program provided by the Chafee Center for International Business at Bryant University (Smithfield, Rhode Island) and the Rhode Island Export Assistance Center (RIEAC). Developed by the Chafee Center in 1989, the ITDN serves as a data multiplier that provides market intelligence from more than 50 data sources. This intelligence includes country- and industry-specific information, trade leads, travel advisories, a currency converter, cultural information, the political climate of a particular country, and news feeds from around the world. The only competitor for the database is the government site STAT-USA, reviewed by *The Charleston Advisor* (vol. 1, issue 4, March 3, 2000). STAT-USA is fee-based, although each federal depository library receives one free concurrent user.

Critical Evaluation

SEARCH INTERFACE

My first reaction to the main page at <<http://www.itdn.net>> is that it is quite busy. The screen is full of links to various information sources including Military and Activity, International, Top Stories, Education, and Computers, all under the broad heading Headlines on the left of the screen. Various Partners, such as Bryant University, The Hartford, Bank of America, APC, etc. are also linked on the right of the main page; I assume these are sponsors of the database. In the middle of the main page are Today's Trade News Headlines. These headlines appear to be very current.

SEARCHING

There is no traditional searching capability on the main page, but it is possible to "search text" within the "Industry Reports and News" and "Country Reports and News" modules. The searching option in those modules, however, is not obvious from the main page, where both Industry and Country are listed along the left side under Top Stories alongside other categories that lead the user only to a list of headlines (i.e., no searching capability). This leads me to believe that the ITDN must be used mainly as a current awareness tool. However, two things

contribute to the user's ability to locate needed information even without traditional searching capability. First, the subject areas on the left of the screen are relatively descriptive: under the broad headings mentioned above are several more specific categories:

Military & Activity: Afghanistan; Iraq; Middle East

International: Global Relations; Trade Specific; Top Ddevelopments; Emerging Markets

Top Stories: Small Business; Business; Federal Watch; Finance; Industry; Country

Education: U.S. News

Computers: Virus Alerts; Security

It seems that it would be simple to choose from that list of categories based on the user's information need. For example, a businessperson interested in the climate of exporting to Iraq would possibly find useful information by clicking on Iraq under Military & Activity, since military events certainly dictate business events.

The second feature that contributes to the user's ability to locate relevant information without traditional searching capability is that the entries are quite well organized, and the database's extensive use of bold and different sizes of fonts facilitate finding relevant information. For example, when I clicked on Afghanistan under Military & Activity on the left side, the information in the middle of the screen changed to that topic, and "Today's Afghanistan Headlines" replaced the previous heading in the middle of the screen. The headlines that appeared were easy to browse: large, bold font was used for the headline itself, and the brief details underneath the headline, including the source of the headline and the time/date stamp, were in a different font and size, making it easy to pick out the headlines I was interested in. Because the information given is very brief, it is relatively easy to pick out the articles of interest. However, it would be helpful if the times given were in the time zone of the user. As it is, the time given is Greenwich time.

When I clicked on the headline for one of the entries, it took me directly to the relevant article within that source. The one I chose was from The Independent World Web site, with which I am not familiar. I wondered about the source's reliability and whether it was from a legitimate organization. I browsed through the entire site but could not find any statement about or list of the sources from which ITDN receives its information. I contacted the vendor, and they provided me with a spreadsheet of the sources that seemed much broader than the list of sources I compiled unscientifically from the database itself. For example, the spreadsheet from the vendor lists the categories Country Reports; Agriculture Related Reports; Other Reports; and Research Data Sources, with the sources listed for each. The sources seem pretty broad, though, including U.S. governmental agencies such as the

★ International Trade Data Network Review Scores Composite: ★★★★★

The maximum number of stars in each category is 5.

Content: ★★★★★

The breadth of content in ITDN is truly amazing. Over fifty data sources, including various U.S. governmental agencies, foreign organizations and commissions, market reports, industry and country reports, news sources, export guides, food market reports, visa requirements, etc., are mined daily for relevant information. In addition, the content seems to be up-to-the-minute. For example, under the Global relations category under International on the left side of the main page, all thirty headlines that appear on the first screen were at most four hours old at the time of review.

Searchability: ★★

There is little traditional searching possible. The only search boxes appear on the Industry Reports and News and Country Reports and News modules. However, the database still seems “searchable” due to the liberal use of headings and categories. Given that it is a current awareness and not a research database, the searchability factor seems less important than with other databases; nonetheless, it would be useful if the main page included at least some traditional searching. The searching that is available should be indicated on the main page. As it stands now, the user does not discover the searching capability until after he or she clicks on one of the modules from the main page, i.e., Industry Reports and News and Country Reports and News.

Pricing Options: ★★★★★

Pricing is very reasonable given the amount of information included. For an institution the size of Providence College (about 4,500 FTE), for example, the annual license fee would be under \$1,500. The fact that there is a maximum cost of \$5,000 per institution indicates that the sponsoring agencies want to keep the pricing as reasonable as possible.

Contract Options: ★★★★★

The licensing agreement appears to have some flexibility. Although technically it is not possible to bookmark specific news articles to access them directly, the vendor does allow customization that could include linking to the durable URLs of the articles via electronic reserves. This requires contacting the vendor directly.

Department of Energy, Department of Defense, Department of Commerce, Department of State, and Department of Labor as well as the World Trade Organization, European Commission, STAT-USA; etc. When I examined the entries under the various categories from the main page, however, the sources were much more specific, including American Politics; Financial Review; Reuters UK; Radio Free Europe; New York Times; Israel National News; ABC News; Market-Watch; United Nations; Morningstar.com; CNBC Africa; The Times; Fortune; the BBC; etc. From my spot-check of the sources in the database, and from the spreadsheet of sources from the vendor, it appears that the sources are from reliable, legitimate organizations.

RSS feeds for specific categories (listed on the home page below the Partners section) also facilitate the usefulness of the database. Users can register for feeds for Country, Industry, Market, Travel, Leads, Speeches, Webcasts, and Training.

Contract Provisions and Authentication

The licensing agreement is standard and straightforward. Authentication is by IP address.

About the Author

Janice G. Schuster is the coordinator of reference services and reference librarian, associate professor, at Providence College in Providence, Rhode Island, since 1991. Her primary responsibilities include reference, managing the library’s electronic resources, overseeing development of the reference collection, library instruction, and serving as library liaison to four academic departments. She previously served as reference librarian (head of reference) at Stonehill College and as reference/circulation librarian at the University of South Carolina-Coastal Carolina College (currently Coastal Carolina University). She holds B.A. and M.L.S. degrees from Indiana University-Bloomington. ■

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