current.txt
UC's Melvyl Currents Content Database:
Year One

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The University of California's Melvyl Current Contents
database contains article citations and table of contents
records from over 6500 journals in all disciplines of the
arts and humanities, sciences, and social sciences. Melvyl
Current Contents is comprised of two databases: CC (Current
Contents Articles) and CCT (Current Contents Table of
Contents). Current Contents Article citations are searchable
by author, article title, journal title, and ISI subject
categories. Current Contents Table of Contents records are
searchable by journal name and ISI subject categories.
Current Contents tapes are leased from the Institute of
Scientific Information and loaded weekly onto a host computer
at the University of California Office of the President
Division of Library Automation in Oakland, California. The
database currently has records dating back to July 1989 and
became available to the University of California community in
April 1990.

The Melvyl system currently offers the Melvyl Catalog (union
catalog for UC and California State Library), Melvyl
Periodical Titles (the California Academic Libraries List of
Serials), Melvyl Current Contents (MCC), Melvyl Medline, and
three IAC databases: Expanded Academic Index, Computer
Database, and National Newspaper Index. The Melvyl system
also provides a gateway to other library catalogs and systems
on the Internet. Melvyl Current Contents uses the same basic
command language as all of the Melvyl system databases.

Since the Melvyl system has been available since 1983, many
users are not starting from scratch and are already familiar
with the Melvyl command language and can readily search MCC.
Access to the Melvyl system and MCC is available from library
terminals or from offices and homes by dial-up or network
connection. While anyone can access the Melvyl system and
the Melvyl Catalog and Periodical Titles databases, passwords
are necessary for remote access to the journal article
databases. The Melvyl system is made available to the
faculty, students, and staff at the nine University of
California campuses and three UC-managed laboratories
(Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory, Lawrence Livermore National

Laboratory, Los Alamos National Laboratory). The potential
number of users are 125,458 undergraduates, 41,089 graduates,
7,429 faculty, 121,557 staff, and 20,685 employees at the three
national laboratories for a grand total of 316,218 (all numbers
are from Fall quarter 1990.) These figures do not include the
non-UC patrons using terminals in the campus libraries.

The same mainframe computer and disk drives are used for all
the Melvyl system databases. All the Melvyl databases are in
contention for CPU processing. Usage data for MCC was
analyzed for May 1990 (first full month of data) through
April 1991. Figure 1 graphs the mean number of FIND commands
and records displayed by two-hour intervals in a 24 hour
period. The FIND command initiates searching and is
equivalent to Dialog's SELECT command. Figure 1 thus
illustrates the mythical average day of enduser searching on
MCC. The period of major usage extends from 10am to 6pm.
At the peak time (2pm - 4pm), 271,014 FIND commands are
issued and 2,579,294 records are displayed. An average of 9-
10 records are displayed for each FIND command. Even during
the wee hours, MCC gets used by die-hards with 4am to 6am
being the period of least usage.

Figure 2 graphs the mean number of FIND commands and records
displayed by month for the first year. One sees an expected
increase in monthly demand during successive months of the
academic year. In May (first full month of availability),
the initial wave of publicity and staff training contributed
to high use. Due to the UC academic calendar, demand falls
off but remains steady during the summer and December. The
peak month is April with 147,925 FIND commands and 1,528,105
records displayed. One can expect demand to increase in
succeeding years and April may not prove to be the peak month
as more data becomes available.

Figure 3 graphs the average response time in seconds for the
FIND command and the record DISPLAY command per month for one
year. The FIND command response time is the time from
receipt of command until transmission of response and ranges
from 0.8 to 1.6 seconds. The DISPLAY command response time
is the time from receipt of command until transmission of
complete screen and ranges from 0.2 to 0.6 seconds.

For the first year, 1,215,042 FIND commands were issued and
11,635,545 records were displayed. These aggregate
figures measure both remote access and library-based access
to MCC. A large volume of use occurs but it is unknown how

much can be attributed to enduser searching. Staff searching
is not distinguished from enduser searching in the Melvyl
system statistics; however, from the authors' experience at
UCSD, enduser searching dwarfs staff searching. For Melvyl
Current Contents, the meter is off. Endusers can search as
many search terms as they want and display as many records as
they want. With the meter off, one sees an average of ten
records displayed for every search. In the authors'
experience, endusers are not using every record displayed
with many records irrelevant to their interests.

These 11,635,545 records would cost $8,144,881 at $0.70 per
record (Dialog's July 1991 rate). These figures lead one to
wonder if commercial databanks and database producers are

pricing themselves out of the enduser market and/or simply
making themselves unavailable to the enduser market? Why are
reduced-cost enduser-oriented database services (eg Knowledge
Index, BRS After Dark) only available in the evening when
this data shows peak enduser searching during the day?
Limiting access to the evening hours is a weak attempt to
capture the enduser searching market. Perhaps the true
intent of limiting access to the evening hours is to get
someone, anyone to use online databanks at night. So who can
capture that elusive enduser? The database producer can go
for the institutional market for enduser searching by leasing
tapes. What about the non-institutional market? Who is
going for the lone endusers? Where do the online databanks
fit in or do they? With the meter off, this article presents
the user load on one multidisciplinary journal article
database. With the meter on, one wonders what the user or
enduser load is for a multidisciplinary journal article
database eg Current Contents?