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Historical Abstracts on the Web

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▼ ADVISOR REVIEWS—STANDARD REVIEW

Historical Abstracts on the Web

Date of Review: August 15, 2007; revised September 10, 2007

Composite Score:

★★★ 3/4

Reviewed by: **Janice G. Schuster**

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Pricing Options

Pricing is based on institution type (historical institute, high school, two- or four-year academic) and FTE. Pricing is also based on User Level (one to six or Unlimited). An institution can subscribe directly with ABC-CLIO or via a consortium.

Product Description

The Web site gives a good general description of the product: <http://serials.abc-clio.com/active/resource/page/aboutHA.html>

Published since 1954, Historical Abstracts has long been recognized as the world's leading bibliographic database for historical study. Historical Abstracts currently covers over 1,700 journals published worldwide in over forty languages. The database comprises over 720,000 entries from periodicals, with full-text links to over 135,000 articles and dissertations and masters' theses.

Each year, the editors of Historical Abstracts add over 16,000 abstracts and citations, over 3,000 book citations, and over 1,200 citations of dissertations and masters' theses to the database from the current literature and publications. Additional bibliographical entries are also added to the database by editorial projects such as retrospective coverage of journal issues published prior to 1954.

Historical Abstracts is committed to covering every significant historical journal published anywhere in the world, as well as journals with historical content published in closely related social science fields. Most articles are abstracted by an experienced group of abstracters, many of whom are historians and librarians, are experts in the content of the journals they cover and who possess the necessary language skills. Other abstracts are provided by the journals. In every case, abstracts are carefully edited for clarity and precision.

Historical Abstracts on the Web includes incomplete, in-process entries awaiting abstracts and, in some cases, title translations.

Critical Evaluation

SEARCH INTERFACE

The basic search screen includes typical search options, including keyword and subject searching and ability to limit to articles, books, reviews, collections, dissertations/theses. The first box is la-

beled Search. I thought that would refer to which database was being searched, but instead it refers to the broad topics of World History Including U.S. and Canada; United States and Canadian History; and World History Excluding US and Canada. The Advanced Search screen includes search boxes for keywords; subject terms; authors/editors; titles/translations; languages; journal names; publication dates; time periods; and entry numbers. Useful features of the search screen include Add/Remove Search Fields; Search History; List Options; Display Options; and Personal Profile. Each of these options can be either viewed or hidden, maintaining the clean look of the search screen. Clear definitions of each of the options appear when one clicks on View.

SEARCHING

On the basic search screen, I tried a keyword search for "Treaty of Versailles" and retrieved 781 records. When I examined the records, I realized that some of them are for publications that have not yet been fully abstracted, i.e., citation only. In our age of OpenURL linking and relatively easy access to full text, I find it a welcome improvement that ABC-CLIO has changed its previous policy of including only fully abstracted publications. However, when I looked on the database site for an explanation of this, I had difficulty finding either specific or general information about the database. I finally realized that information about the database is available by clicking on the database name at the top of the searching screen. This could be more obvious by having a clickable button labeled Help or Database Information or even a question mark.

Regarding Help, it is not immediately obvious that mousing over certain areas on the search screen reveals searching Help for that area. For example, mousing over Subject on the advanced or basic search screens gives some information about that field's searching capability. A clickable icon, possibly a question mark or the word Help, would be more obvious than the mousing over.

On the advanced search screen, I clicked on the icon next to the Subject search field and entered "Treaty of Versailles." The results list retrieved no relevant subjects. I then entered "Versailles" as the term, which retrieved several entries for "Versailles, treaty of." The vendor should add "see" references to the subject list to improve the searcher's results.

When I added "Versailles, treaty of" to my search, 203 items were retrieved, some of which were in languages other than English. The full record clearly indicates in which language the item appears, and specifying desired languages is possible through the Add/Remove Search Fields option.



Historical Abstracts on the Web Review

Scores Composite: ★★ ★ 3/4

The maximum number of stars in each category is 5.

Content: ★★

At least some of the content does not appear to be very current. Specifically, the database seems to be slow to include book reviews. The managing editor of Historical Abstracts indicated that book citations are taken from *Library Journal*; *Choice*; *The Journal of Asian Studies*; *The American Historical Review*; *Isis*; and *History: Reviews of New Books*. I spot-checked 19 total references from the June and July of 2007 issues of *Choice* and found that only 3 of them, or 16 percent, are included in the Historical Abstracts database. I did a similar check of *Isis* and the *American Historical Review*, checking 40 total references from the following issues: *Isis*: March and June of 2007; *American Historical Review*: April and June of 2007. Only 21 of the 40 book reviews that I checked from those 4 issues, or 53 per cent, are included in the database.

Searchability: ★★★★★

The new search interface is a marked improvement over the previous one. The search screen is clear and easy to understand. Context-specific Help screens would be helpful, and finding general information about the database could be improved.

Pricing Options: ★★★★★

Several options are available including FTE for site licenses and for simultaneous users.

Contract Options: ★★★★★

The odd statement about confidentiality should be clarified or deleted.

A very useful feature is the ability, on the full record, to choose subjects used to index the item and then to redo the search using those terms. ABC-CLIO makes this simple to do. However, it is not obvious how the terms are connected in the search: Boolean OR or AND? Since the Help function is at the top of the screen and not context-specific, I couldn't find the answer to that question within the database.

Also on the Advanced Search screen, adding and removing search fields is very easy. Clicking on the box next to the field immediately either adds or removes that field from the search options. I also find it useful that all of the advanced searching options are included on the front page of the AdvancedSearch. One does not have to click further to find the various options.

RESULTS DISPLAY

The retrieved items display cleanly and clearly. It would be helpful if the item's language were visible on the short record instead of only on the full record. The option for Check to Add to Personal List and E-mail to or Print are logically on the short record. The OpenURL link resolver link is also on the short record; in contrast that link appears only on the full record in some other databases. Giving the searcher as many options as possible on the short record is a good thing.

PRINT, E-MAIL OPTIONS

I tried the E-mail to option for one of the short records on the results display and received a clear response message indicating the record had been sent. The message even highlighted the e-mail address I had entered (which would be useful in case of a typo). The resulting e-mail included the citation and abstract even though I had sent it from

the short record (which does not include the abstract). This is a time-saving feature that should be appreciated by users.

The print feature works the same as e-mailing: the entire record is printed, including the abstract, even if the print command is sent from the short record, which does not include the abstract. One suggestion about printing is to change the heading on the printout from Both Serials Databases to the specific database being searched, in this instance Historical Abstracts.

Contract Provisions

The license agreement seems standard. However, there is an odd statement under the Confidentiality section (section 4): "Portions of the Licensed Materials are proprietary or trade secrets of ABC-CLIO or of the parties under whose license ABC-CLIO provides the Licensed Materials." I assume this refers to the programming and/or system details. I have never seen this statement in a license agreement. Also,

Contact Information

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at my institution, the governing law state would need to be changed from California to Rhode Island, or deleted altogether.

Authentication

IP or username/password authenticated.

Author's Selected References

ABC-CLIO historical abstracts. ABC-Clio. Annual academic subscription starts at \$1,575.00. Internet Resource. Reviewed in September 2006 *Choice*.

About the Author

Janice G. Schuster is the coordinator of reference services and reference librarian 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 seven academic departments and/or programs. 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. ■