BIDS - PUTTING THE SEARCH INTO RESEARCH

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BIDS is now perhaps the best known on-line bibliographic data service in UK academia. This article describes the service, support arrangements, database coverage, and then goes on to look at some findings of a recent survey on user satisfaction with BIDS. It concludes with a brief look at future developments.

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Introduction

BIDS has grown in the four years since its establishment to be perhaps the most widely known and used on-line database service in UK academia. Since the launch of the first database, the service has seen steady growth in the number of users, the number of sites subscribing, the range of databases and the facilities provided for users. The number of people accessing the ISI (Institute for Scientific Information) databases alone is now peaking at over 30,000 per week.

Because the first databases mounted (ISI) are multi-disciplinary, the service has attracted interest from a wide variety of subject specialists, many of whom had little or no previous experience in using networked information services. There is evidence of a widespread awareness of BIDS services, both within the UK academic community, and elsewhere, in industry and overseas.

This article sets out to describe the current service and the databases available through it. It then goes on to review some of the experience of the first four years of operation, with particular reference to a detailed survey[1] by Harry East and colleagues of the Centre for Communication & Information Studies (CCIS) to be published shortly. Finally, some conclusions will be drawn and the article will finish with some speculation as to the future.

The BIDS Service

BIDS (Bath Information & Data Services), based at the University of Bath, has been operating a networked end-user bibliographic information retrieval service since February 1991. On payment of an annual fee, anyone at a subscribing institution with a terminal or personal computer linked to the network can connect to the service. Searches of commercial bibliographic databases, often previously mediated by library staff to save connect-time and search costs, can be carried out directly by end-users. Results are shown on screen, or can be e-mailed back to the user's mailbox. See references 2, 3 and 4 for a more complete description of the development of the BIDS service.

In summary, the key features of BIDS data services are:

- End-user services, free at the point of delivery
- On-line access via JANET, or any Internet-connected network
- Menu-driven interface - designed for non-expert searchers