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# Fall E-reference Update, 2010 Part 2: E-books

Sue Polanka

*Wright State University - Main Campus*, sue.polanka@wright.edu

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## by Jack O'Gorman and Sue Polanka

Four years ago, RBB featured its first article comparing electronic reference aggregator and publisher interfaces, and a second article followed in the November 1, 2007, issue. Three years later, we are taking another detailed look at the e-book interfaces and offerings from reference publishers. Much has changed in three years, particularly with the interface features and access to content. Audio, video, Flash animations, Web 2.0 tools like bookmarking and note taking, access to content through the open web, and mobile devices and applications have all appeared, and continue to grow. A new word, *discoverability,* emerged as well: the ability for users to find and use scholarly reference content hidden behind firewalls and passwords. Discoverability will continue to drive the future of electronic reference product development. But for the here and now, we offer this matrix to describe and compare the e-book services and features of six reference publishers: ABC-CLIO, Credo Reference, Gale Virtual Reference Library (GVRL), Infobase, Oxford Reference Online, and Sage Reference Online. Referring to this chart, reviewers can focus upon what is distinctive about the content and features of an electronic reference platform.

|  | ABC-CLIO | Credo | GVRL | Infobase | Oxford | Sage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Type of content | Reference, multivolume encyclopedias, professional development, variety of hot-topic issues/current events | Encyclopedias and such dictionaries as quotation, bilingual, and crossword | Reference, multivolume encyclopedias, Spanish language, travel guides, professional development titles for K–12 | Circulating and reference books | Reference guides, dictionaries, Companions, and other reference sources | Multi- and single-volume encyclopedias, glossaries, handbooks for the social sciences and allied health |
| Audience | School, public, and academic libraries and general readers | School, public, and academic libraries | School, public, academic, and special libraries | School, public, and academic libraries | School, public, and academic libraries | High-school, public, and academic libraries |
| # Titles available | 6,500+ | 500+ | 6,000+ | 3,500+ | 200+ | 210+ |
| Publishers included | 5 | 70+ | 70+ | 6 | 1 | 1 |
| Update frequency/ titles added | As titles are added, 30–50 per month | As titles are added, monthly updates | As titles are added, at least 100 per month | 50–80 per month | Three times per year; factual corrections throughout the year | As titles are added, approximately 70 per year |
| Access | Via IP and remote or username/ password | Via IP and remote | Via IP and remote | Via IP and remote | Via IP and remote access or username/ password; personal subscription also available | Via IP and remote or username/ password |
| Business models | One-time purchase; no hosting fees for first five years | Subscriptions; additional content is extra | One-time purchase of individual titles; professional development titles also by package | One-time purchase of individual titles or subject collection | Subscription | One-time purchase of collections or individual titles |
| Cost | FTE e-book pricing begins at parity with print pricing | Contact vendor | Based on FTE or population ratio | 100 percent of print price for individual schools; FTE or cardholders influence prices | Contact vendor | Individual titles; discounts apply for collections |
| Library customization features | Library branding | Library branding, custom menu links, links to library resources | Library URL only | Library branding, MARC records, search widgets, library logo, direct URL for each e-book | Subscriber logo display, search box | Library branding and URL customization under development |

| | ABC-CLIO | Credo | GVRL | Infobase | Oxford | Sage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Search features** | Keyword, title, author, search within title and across collection, advanced search including Boolean, saved search history | Keyword, relevance, rank, date display, Boolean searching, search within headings, browse by title, "Topic Pages" | Keyword, browse, subject clusters; limit searches to images, date subject, target audience | Keyword, author, ISBN, imprint, subject | Quick search; search by title or subject; advanced search includes Boolean, pattern, multiple subject, people, entry headings, and full text | Quick and advanced search of full text, within fielded Boolean facets |
| **Results list features** | Sort by relevance, titles, author, publication date | Facets; send search to other library resources, related people | Search within results; change sort order; limit by publication type | Limit results by subject, relevancy ranked, change results view, and number of items displayed | Refine search by longer entries, shorter entries, bilingual dictionaries, and maps in illustrations | Search within results; sort or limit results by facet; relevancy ranked |
| **Output features** | Print, e-mail, download, export citations to citation software | Print, e-mail, download, copy to clipboard, export to citation software | Print, e-mail, download, export to citation software | Print, e-mail, download | Print, e-mail | Print, e-mail, download (page view), citations |
| **Unique interface features** | "Did You Mean?" suggestions, content presented by chapter/entry rather than page by page | Concept mapping and image searching, video and audio clips, Flash animation | Translate to eight different languages and read aloud via ReadSpeaker | Password-protected notes, bookmarks, includes dictionary tool | Link to ProQuest/ Chadwyck-Healy Literature Online | Readers' Guide for each title; banner identifies title being viewed; search library catalogs from bibliographies |
| **Format** | HTML | HTML | HTML, PDF, MP3 | PDF, HTML (fall 2010) | HTML | HTML; front/back matter in PDF (multimedia titles coming in January) |
| **Internal links** | TOC, endnotes, index, cross-references, and *see also* | Cross-references, TOC, "Topic Finder" | TOC, index, images, charts | TOC; index is not linked | TOC, cross-references, headwords, and time-line links | TOC, *A–Z* readers' guides, index |
| **Persistent URL level** | Title, entries, chapters | Title, entry, images | Titles, entries, images, each page | Titles, chapters, page | Titles, entries, each page | Titles, entries, chapters |
| **Use data** | COUNTER compliant | COUNTER compliant and on-demand | COUNTER and SUSHI compliant, e-mail options | Use tracking and reporting available | ICOLC stats available | COUNTER compliant |
| **Web 2.0 features** | Bookmarks and notes | Share through social media | Tagging | Notes, bookmarks | "Fact of the Day" | In development |
| **DRM (limits on save/print/export)** | Printing and e-mailing by chapter or entry; no entire book/volume | Entries may be printed, e-mailed, saved, or shared; no entire book/volume | Entries may be printed, e-mailed, saved, or bookmarked; no entire book/volume | Individual pages may be printed, e-mailed, or saved; no entire book/volume | Subscription suspended if more than 3,500 pages are downloaded in one session | Entries may be printed, e-mailed, saved, or shared; no entire book/volume |
| **Discoverability techniques used** | Federated and discovery search compatibility | "Topic Pages" | Access My Library via search engines and mobile application; search widgets; subcollections; cross-search with other GVRL databases | Search widgets | API used by MuseGlobal and Serials Solutions federated search; titles routinely added to Serials Solutions and Ex Libris knowledge bases | First 200 words in search engines; metadata delivery to federated and discovery search tools |
| **Mobile platforms** | Forthcoming | None | Access My Library | None | None | None, under investigation |
| **Smart-phone/ reader compatibility** | Via most Internet-enabled devices | Via most Internet-enabled devices | Via most Internet-enabled devices | None | Via most Internet-enabled devices | Via most Internet-enabled devices |