December 2005

Group Therapy

Beth Bernhardt
University of North Carolina at Greensboro, beth_bernhardt@uncg.edu

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Recommended Citation
Bernhardt, Beth (2005) 'Group Therapy,' Against the Grain: Vol. 17: Iss. 6, Article 34.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.4616

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Group Therapy

by Beth Bernardt (Electronic Journals / Document Delivery Librarian, Jackson Library, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, PO Box 26170, Greensboro, NC 27402; Phone: 336-256-1210; Fax: 336-334-5097) <beth_bernhardt@uncg.edu>

GRIPE: Submitted by Helen M. Aiello (Serials/Electronic Resources Librarian, Wesleyan University Library)

Now that Scopus has entered the sci/tech database field, I wonder what institutions who subscribe to ISI’s World of Science are planning to do? Since I suspect that many schools do not have the financial resources to run both products, if Scopus proves to be a viable product, this may present a difficult choice down the road, and, further compounded by the fact that many subscribers have purchased “perpetual access rights” to ISI. Any comments on how your school may be approaching this topic will be most appreciated.

RESPONSE: Submitted by Rick Anderson (Director of Resource Acquisition, University of Nevada, Reno Libraries)

Like many schools, we were recipients of a full-court marketing pitch from Elsevier when Scopus was released. Their sales pitch was completely appropriate, and the arguments and strategies they used to strengthen the sales pitch were reasonable: they enumerated some of Scopus’ obvious strengths as a product, offered us a significant discount (technically because we’re ScienceDirect subscribers, though I suspect the discount would have been extended even if we weren’t), gave us multi-year payment options, and even offered to give us a year of free access, following which we would have the option of cancelling without penalty. To Elsevier, this last offer was really the trump card. A year’s worth of no-strings access at no charge — what, they asked, did we have to lose?

The answer is that we stood to lose plenty. The problem is not with the product itself; Scopus looks like a wonderful tool, and subscribers whose opinions I trust have told me that they and their patrons all love it. I have no reason to doubt them. The problem is the price, combined with our budget situation. Our materials budget is flat this year, which means that we will have to find cuts matching the rate of inflation in order to avoid going into deficit. The purchase of a new citation index at a price in the tens of thousands of dollars is simply not feasible right now — and making it available to our patrons for a year would only set us up for a political firestorm later, when we have to cancel a product our patrons have gotten used to having (because we still won’t be able to afford it).

We do subscribe to Web of Science, which is more expensive than Scopus. Is it possible that we might cancel Web of Science in favor of Scopus? Yes. But not without consulting extensively with the affected faculty at our institution, many of whom are deeply attached to Web of Science and may or may not agree that

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Scopus represents an improvement. That consultation will involve some kind of trial access, but it will have to be controlled. We have just hired a new science librarian, and she will take the lead in any future consideration of the Scopus question.

RESPONSE: Submitted by Julie C. Blake (Collection Management Coordinator) and Keith Ewing, (Systems Librarian) at St. Cloud State University

In summer, 2004, we were offered the chance to be one of five trial sites in our regional consortium (48 nationwide) to test a new Elsevier database called Scopus. Elsevier isn’t our favorite vendor, but they are far from the worst. The trial ran through fall, 2004. At that point we provided relatively few science indexes; despite undergraduate programs in a wide array of sciences and Master’s programs in biology, computer sciences, engineering, environmental and technological studies, and math, the only science databases we then subscribed to were Applied Science and Technology Index, BasicBIOISIS, GeoRef, SciFinder Scholar (Chem Abs), and ScienceDirect (heavily subsidized by our consortium and more for full-text than indexing). Instead, students tended to use EBSCOHost Academic Search Premier (also provided by our consortium), broad enough to include sciences, but not sufficient for research needs. Despite numerous faculty requests, we were unable to add sources like BIOSIS, Compendex, Inspect, or Web of Science due to financial constraints — and we didn’t want to get into battles over which department should get its database first.

ISTI’s Web of Science (WoS) has always been well out of our price range, costing more than the sum subscription costs of most of our current databases. In addition, we primarily support student curricular and research needs where citation searching is under-utilized; so, while Elsevier was marketing Scopus as a competitor to WoS, we never really viewed it that way. Instead, we viewed Scopus as a means of getting broad science indexing coverage, although a number of social science titles are included as well — not altogether different from WoS in content except for the interface and potential pricing. Because we were an early tester and subscriber, we were able to get a very nice three-year contract for Scopus. We agreed to make the commitment to do so, although when the cost returns to the normal pricing model at the end of the contract, still projected to be less than the quote for WoS, we don’t know whether we’ll be able to sustain access.

We opened the trial across campus, and patrons over all were favorably impressed. They liked the interface and the idea that we had much more science coverage than ever before. Even the engineering faculty agreed that it was much better than nothing. We also compared coverage and searching to a number of other databases. According to our Engineering Information (EI) representative, all of Compendex is included in Scopus because both are owned by Elsevier. However, a title-by-title comparison did not hold this to be true as of April, 2005. In the first half of the A’s, 19 titles listed as “core” in Compendex were not included in Scopus. The representative promised to look into this, but we have received no explanation. All but two titles in BasicBIOISIS were also in Scopus, and those two didn’t seem to fulfill the needs of local programs. When a Thomson/ISTI representative paid a sales call to pitch Web of Science, we did some comparative searches as well. In almost every instance in the sciences, Scopus showed more results than WoS. WoS appeared to be focusing more on indexing the ISI high impact factor journals, while Scopus provided a broader range of results, including high impact factor journals such as Accounts of Chemical Research or Advances in Physics, for example. Scopus also works well with our OpenURL link resolver (SNX) and of course in providing links to ScienceDirect. It is less friendly in sending citations to RefWorks, our bibliographic citation manager, primarily because we have not opted at this time to purchase the special RefWorks support for Scopus. The two databases provoke very different emotional responses in the acquisition decision. WoS is from ISI, a highly respected company that for a long time had a monopoly, which didn’t seem to bother librarians, on citation indexing. Scopus is from Elsevier, a company that does not garner much respect in the library community, largely because of monopolistic pricing for some of its journals, despite their high impact factors. Emotion aside, WoS and Scopus are very comparable in many areas, with Scopus, so far, having the edge in interface and price.

RESPONSE: Submitted by Elizabeth L. Winter (Electronic Resources Librarian, Georgia State University Library)

This is clearly an issue that academic libraries will be investigating in the future if they have not already done so, as evidenced by the recent (September) discussion on this topic on the SERIALS list (archives available at http://list.uwm.edu/archives/serials.html)

Since most institutions will not have the funds to subscribe to both Web of Science and SCOPUS, all but a few, fortunate libraries will likely have to make a choice between the two products — or sacrifice the purchasing of other resources in order to subscribe to both. I agree that this issue is complicated by the fact that some subscribers have made large one-time purchases to obtain perpetual access to backfile content from the Web of Science. For those who already own large amounts of this backfile content, I find it difficult to believe that dropping Web of Science altogether would be a viable option. Even though Georgia State has purchased a relatively small portion of the available backfile, I’m certain that this will be a factor for us in comparing the two products. We haven’t yet begun a trial of SCOPUS, but as we contemplate the opportunity, one of the primary issues we’re beginning to face is the coverage — breadth, depth, and inclusion of core journals — that SCOPUS provides in comparison with Web of Science.

Core title coverage between SCOPUS and Web of Science, thus far, has been difficult to compare efficiently. SCOPUS offers a list of titles in Excel format (available at http://info.scopus.com/aboutscopus/contentcoverage/index.shtml), but Web of Science only provides a browsable list in HTML format, and you’ve got to click through page-by-page to see all titles (available at http://scientific.thomson.com/mjL), so we haven’t yet found an efficient way to put the title lists side-by-side to determine the amount and type of overlap and to identify unique titles.

Another content issue that may factor in for some potential adopters is that SCOPUS does not contain Arts and Humanities citations as Web of Science does, but instead focuses on Science and Social Science journals. Whether this is a concern for your library would likely depend on the types of programs offered at your university and how heavily you rely on Web of Science for Arts and Humanities coverage. Also with regard to content, we’re concerned about the completeness of the coverage in SCOPUS. As of August, Elsevier claimed that cited references were complete back to 1996 and that SCOPUS contained abstracts back to 1966 for 81% of the journals indexed.

In addition to the content-related issues I’ve mentioned, there are several other criteria on which to compare the two products. Two important ones we’ll be looking at are pricing (including both the actual amount you’ll spend and value — what you’ll get for what you pay) and interface (including overall usability as well as the suitability of search and results-management features for your particular user population).

For an in-depth comparison of the two products, take a look at the review by David Goodman and Louise Deis published in the January 2005 issue of The Charleston Advisor. This review compares SCOPUS and Web of Science in great detail across a number of facets related to coverage, usability, pricing, and contract. I recommend this thorough analysis for any library evaluating the two products head-to-head, with the caveat that the review was done in early December 2004, so the coverage information in the review, particularly for SCOPUS, is certain to be out-of-date now. Elsevier has made additional priority during 2005, and Goodman and Deis note that, “when the publisher demonstrates that the basic data has been loaded we will reevaluate the product” (p.5).