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You May Have More Than You Think: Journals Holdings At the Article Level

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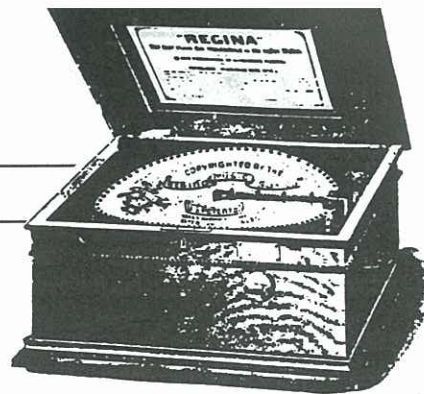
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ISSN: It's Still Some Number!

by Regina Reynolds (Library of Congress) <rrey@loc.gov>

At it approaches its twenty-fifth year, the ISSN, the "social security number of the serials world," is in wider demand and used in more ways than ever. Far from being made obsolete by the upsurge in electronic serials and the popularity of the World Wide Web, the International Standard Serial Number now graces more than 400 electronic serials. And, a Web search on the letters "ISSN" using the AltaVista search engine resulted in over 40,000 matching entries, from journals, newsletters, articles, and citations on the Web which have included an ISSN. Among its many other applications, the ISSN is used in barcodes, abstracting and indexing citations, and document delivery systems. Further out on the horizon, the ISSN has been proposed as a component of the URN, the developing Universal Resource Name standard for identifying Internet resources.

The International Standard Serial Number, (ISO 3297 and NISO Z39.9) actually began as the SSN, a U.S. standard. The U.S. standard was developed in 1970 by Subcommittee 20 of the American National Standards Institute's Z39 Committee, now known as the National Information Standards Organization (NISO). Also in 1970, the International Standards Organization's Technical Committee 46 (ISO T/C 46) recommended that the SSN become an international standard. The **R.R. Bowker Company** was selected to begin ISSN implementation by numbering the entries in its Serials Bibliography file in 1971. In 1972, the **National Serials Data Project** (now the NSDP, the National Serials Data Program) was established as a collaboration of the three National Libraries: The **Library of Congress**, The **National Library of Medicine**, and The **National Agricultural Library**. In 1974,



NSDP became part of the Library of Congress's Serial Record Division, where it remains today.

The ISSN consists of eight digits plus the prefix "ISSN." It is always written with its prefix and a hyphen between two groups of four digits each. According to the international standard, "ISSN" denotes both the singular and plural forms. And, even though it's "smart" to have an ISSN, NSDP's former head, **Julia Blixrud**, used to like to startle audiences by calling the ISSN "just a dumb number." By that she meant that unlike the ISBN which has identifiable country and publisher prefixes, the numbers in the ISSN carry no inherent meaning. The only "intelligence" in the ISSN is that the last digit is a check digit calculated on a base 11. The check digit allows for checking a number to detect transcription errors. The use of base 11 for the check digit results in some ISSN ending in an "X", which is always written as a capital letter. On a few occasions NSDP staff have helped give meaning of sort to the ISSN, as when a numerologist asked for an auspicious number and staff allowed her to choose her own, or when an ISSN cataloger was able to use an ISSN whose last four digits matched the end of the Byzantine empire for an appropriate publication.

NSDP is the U.S. center of the **ISSN Network**, which consists of over 60 ISSN centers worldwide. NSDP is responsible for ISSN assignments to serials published in the United States. Two little-known exceptions to NSDP's jurisdiction over U.S. imprints are that NSDP may not assign ISSN to publications of international bodies, such as the United Nations, nor to publications of certain multi-national publishers, often those with headquarters outside the U.S. The ISSN International Centre assigns ISSN to international publications and responsibility for the titles of multinational publishers is divided among the centers located in the countries in which the multinationals have offices.

The **ISSN International Centre**, the coordinating centre of the ISSN Network, is located in Paris. The International Centre is responsible for allocating ISSN blocks, maintaining and distributing the ISSN database of over 700,000 records, coordinating network policy and practices, establishing and training new centers, and assigning ISSN to international titles and titles which are published in countries without ISSN centers. Most ISSN centers are located in national libraries or national centers for science and technology. The principal product of the ISSN Network is the **ISSN Register**, the database of ISSN and associated records. The Register is distributed on tape (by negotiated license), on a

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You May Have More Than You Think: Journal Holdings At the Article Level

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Many electronic journal indexes now provide the means to search for articles in specific journals. **SilverPlatter**, **FirstSearch** and **IAC** all offer indexes with search software that has this capability. This type of software has several practical applications. An important one is profiling an index against a journal collection. Compared to the method of just identifying which journal titles in a collection are covered by an index and figuring their sum as a percentage of the total number of all journal titles covered by that index, profiling an index's coverage of that collection at the article level should reveal a more detailed, if not more accurate, picture.

At the **Robert Scott Small Library** of the **College of Charleston**, that was the experience with **SilverPlatter's PsycLit**. Of the 1,352 journal titles listed in **Psychological Abstract's** 1995 coverage list, the Robert Scott Small Library houses 271 or 20% of the title count. However, a count at the article level yields a different result. Of the 685,436 articles cited on **SilverPlatter's** two **PsycLit** article discs, '74-'89 and '90-'95 (Figure supplied by **APA**, 4/30/96), 199,714 appear in these 271 journals. Hence, at the article level, 199,714/685,436 or up to 29% of all the cited articles on these two discs could be in the Robert Scott Small Library.

This set of 199,714 articles has some interesting statistical characteristics. Five titles produced article counts at five times the mean of 737. They are **Psychological Reports** at 10,358, **Perceptual and Motor Skills** at 9,966, **American Journal of Psychiatry** at 7,800, **Social Psychology** at 4,597 and **Animal Behavior** at 3,880. This set also has a standard deviation of 1156, a figure much greater than the mean. In our case, this explains why the title count method is not the most accurate way to describe **PsycLit's** coverage of the library's collection.

Of course, approaching the maximum of 29% requires more complete holdings for each journal title. However, this maximum may be an important factor to consider when evaluating or re-evaluating an index for purchase. On a smaller scale, this ability to count articles by journal title has other applications. Just knowing how many articles from a journal are cited in an index could influence the process of selecting new journal titles and adding back issues.

Here at the Robert Scott Small Library, we plan to make our file of 271 **PsycLit** journals available to patrons as a loadable search from a pull-down menu in the **SilverPlatter** software. Hopefully, combining any search with this subset of 199,714 article citations will emphasize the library's collection and mitigate potential patron frustration resulting from not having so many of the journals or articles cited in the index. In the final analysis, however, the overall flexibility of an electronic index's search software may prove to be just as important as its coverage of the collection. We'll keep you posted. 🐜