

Use of Current Contents®in Developing Countries.

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Despite the widespread use of Current Contents, and its established importance in the dissemination of scientific information, relatively few articles about CC have appeared in the scientific and technical literature. Aside from occasional articles evaluating current awareness services, it is probably unrealistic to expect that many articles about CC will be written. However indispensable they are, one doesn't expect articles about Bunsen burners and Erlenmeyer flasks. Like them, Current Contents seems to have become for its readers an accepted and expected item of research equipment about which extensive comment would be superfluous.

Occasionally, however, articles do appear that point up just how successfully Current Contents is, in the words used on our masthead, "an effective and economic solution of the treble problem of literature scanning, reading selection, and rapid dissemination of information." As long ago as 1962, Dr. Ethan Allan Brown published an article entitled, "How I get the meat out of 700 journals a month" in which he pointed out something that is probably obvious to most CC readers: "...to read papers in up to 100 journals a month and receive and read papers in over 600 other journals, ...my best investment is my subscription to Current Contents." That was in 1962; Dr. Brown's subscription now gives him access to almost 1,000 journals.

In another more recent article,² Solomon Posen of the Sydney Hospital in Australia points out that "at the present time, the cheapest substitute for a good library is a subscription to *Current Contents*, a plentiful supply of reprint request cards, and some filing cabinets." (I might dispute the need for the filing cabinets, but otherwise find Dr. Posen's conclusion unassailable.)

One point made by Dr. Posen is the vital role played by CC in getting information in the form of reprints to the researcher hampered by poor library facilities; and poor library facilities, though by no means characteristic of only developing countries, are there in general a troublesome impediment to scientific research. I have discussed the economics of the reprint exchange system elsewhere,3 and it has been attacked from various quarters, frequently as by Rose with some humor,4 for apparently unavoidable extravagances and absurdities. But Dr. Posen has not overlooked the importance of Current Contents and the reprint system for developing countries. He has been seconded by Bannur and Purandare, authors of a recent paper published in India.5

In developing countries, as the authors point out, library budgets restrict not only the number of periodicals that can be purchased from abroad, but also

any general use of airmail for rapid delivery of journal issues. The value of Current Contents and the reprint system for scientists in India and their colleagues in other developing countries is made clear by Bannur and Purandare: "Current Contents not only helps us to get advance information about articles appearing in journals which we are going to receive after 2-3 months, but in it we also get the information about articles in many more journals which we are not going to receive in our libraries. Moreover, Current Contents gives the address of authors which we can make

use [of] for asking for ... reprints free of cost from the authors."

However much the reprint exchange system is abused in the developed countries, as Posen and Rose suggest it may be, we should not forget how important it is to scientists in developing countries. It is, in effect, a form of international aid of which we are generally unmindful. That Current Contents plays so significant a role in distribution of this aid to science abroad is, of course, a source of great satisfaction to me.

- 1. Brown, E.A. How I get the meat out of 700 journals a month. Medical Economics 39(6): 128-143 (1962).
- 2. Posen, S. & Posen, J.S. The geography of reprint requests. J. Med. Education 44(8): 648-654 (August 1969).
- 3. Garfield, E. Is the "free reprint system" free and/or obsolete. Current Contents 8(22): 3-4 (June 1, 1965).
- 4. Rose, M.S. The golden reprint; one man's view of the joys and absurdities of the reprint game. New Scientist 43(659): 196 (24 July 1969).
- Bannur, B.B. & Purandare, G.M. Current Contents, an essential economical tool for Indian research libraries. IASLIC Bulletin 14(3):102-105 (September 1969).