

Current Comments

ISI Custom Search and
Research Services,
Small and Large,
Serve an International Clientele

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One of the pleasures of publishing regularly is the continual feedback from readers. Like most authors, I enjoy hearing from other authors. And most *Current Contents*[®] (CC[®]) readers publish regularly in the journals we index.

Judging from my mail, however, there is a widespread impression among readers that I am able to manipulate our data bases without the slightest effort. I suppose this is in part due to my efforts to make it all seem easy. What is often not realized is that considerable human effort may be required to extract some desired data in the first place. It is only then that answering a question becomes easy. Yes, the various ISI[®] data bases are a mine of information. But the ore a gold mine produces must first be processed if the nuggets are to be retrieved.

After reading some of the citation studies published in *CC*, readers often write or call ISI to ask for more information. We welcome these requests and, when possible, provide the information without delay. However, over the years, our attempts to accommodate these requests developed into two research services. These have now been available from ISI for about ten years. I refer to *ISI Search Service* and *ISI Contract Research Service*.

ISI Search Service is designed primarily for individual librarians, research scientists, journal editors, or administrators who need to do a literature search on a specific topic. These searches may involve one or a dozen hours of work. *ISI Con-*

tract Research Service, on the other hand, handles assignments on a much larger scale. These are done primarily for private institutions, businesses, or government. The scope of these contracts is quite varied, but usually involves the manipulation of our unique data bases to provide bibliometric or scientometric, as well as scientific, information. These are useful for studying the activities of competitors, the structure of science, the state of the art in a specific branch of research, etc.

ISI Search Service has operated successfully since 1969. When you make a specific request, an ISI specialist searches the relevant literature. Ordinarily, this provides answers to specific questions. The service is fast, relatively inexpensive, and to the point. This service is sometimes just an extension of the specialized reference services provided in research libraries or information departments of major corporations. Like reference librarians or search analysts elsewhere, our staff is trained to know exactly where to go for the information needed. And they are not confined to using ISI data bases.

Indeed, *ISI Search Service* uses more than 100 online data bases, including *ISI/BIOMED*[™], *ISI/CompuMath*[™], *ISI/GEOSCITECH*[™], and *ISI/ISTP&B*[™], which are unique to the *ISI Search Network*. Naturally, we choose the data base or bases most suited to your needs. We also use ISI's printed indexes—*Science Citation Index*[®] (*SCI*[®]), *Social Sciences Citation*

Index[®] (*SSCI*[®]), *Arts & Humanities Citation Index*[™] (*A&HCI*[™]), and *Index Chemicus*[®], as well as the weekly indexes to seven editions of *CC*. All of these data bases are well known for their currency, often covering information not retrievable elsewhere for six months or more.

ISI Search Service is designed to benefit several types of clients. For example, libraries which don't have extensive reference collections or online capabilities can use this service to help meet the bibliographic needs of their users. For those libraries in which work loads occasionally peak beyond employee capabilities, but do not justify hiring more help, *ISI Search Service* can be an occasional lifesaver. Individuals in isolated areas who don't have access to major library resources will also find *ISI Search Service* cost effective.

ISI Search Service can be especially helpful to publishing scientists. Suppose you are preparing a paper for publication. You did a thorough search of the literature before writing the paper, and you feel confident that it is fairly complete. However, your own laboratory work, as well as the actual writing of the paper, has taken several months. Before you submit the paper, you need to make sure that your findings have not been contradicted or duplicated in the recent literature. Even if you haven't been scooped, you may want to see if anything new has been reported that could affect your work.

We can update your earlier search with a list of recent, relevant articles. If you haven't bothered to check your list of cited references in *SCI*, we can do that for you as well. After you review the results of our search, you can submit your paper. Referees will be impressed by your coverage of the relevant literature.

You may wish to use *ISI Search Service* before you begin a project. We can supply you with an appropriate, comprehensive bibliography. Or perhaps you

published a study last year and now you're doing a follow-up report. You want to know who has cited your last paper, and what sort of comments they made about it. If their remarks were critical, you might want to address them in your current paper. *ISI Search Service* can find those citations for you—nothing you couldn't have done yourself if you had the time and the facilities.

A frequent question concerns publications from conferences. Quite often a reader remembers that a colleague gave a paper, but can't recall the exact conference or place. Since we promptly index most published conferences and books on a chapter-by-chapter basis, we can obtain such information easily.

For the many readers who have expressed interest in citation analysis, our custom service is a good way to experiment with it at a low cost. For example, *ISI Search Service* can provide you with a list of the core journals in a field, and tell you who is doing the high impact work in that field. We can identify the high impact papers published in your department, and show how they are related to other papers in the same field. This information may help you in planning future research.

Journal editors and publishers will also find *ISI Search Service* helpful. They can use it to learn which articles published by their journals are highly cited. We can provide an article-by-article citation analysis of your journal. Depending upon the size of the journal, you may want a complete list of citing articles. This list can be kept up to date through our *Automatic Subject Citation Alert (ASCA*[™]) service. This is how one publisher identified his list of potential authors.

Larger journals may just want an idea of how their particular journal interacts with other journals. This helps to identify the competition, so to speak. I am often amused by advertisements that refer to ISI's citation data to establish the credibility of a journal. I find this amus-

Table 1: Some typical problems which *ISI® Search Service* can solve.

- What has been published on this subject?
- How many people have cited the paper we published last year? Have there been critical comments or corrections?
- List the publications that have cited documents in the bibliography of this article.
- What pharmacological studies have been published on this series of compounds?
- What chemical compounds have been reported containing the following substructures...
- What are the core, or milestone, papers in this field?
- What conferences or proceedings on this topic were held in the US last year? Abroad?
What organizations sponsored them?
- What are the core journals in this field?
- What places of scientific interest are located in or near this city?
- How many other organizations are doing research in our field?
- Who are the recognized experts on this subject?

ing because the competing journals involved are so well known and accepted by the scientific community.

Even more pertinent is the ability to identify qualified referees. In any event, by observing the citation patterns of the subjects you now cover, *ISI Search Service* can give you a better idea of how that information is being used in research or in applications. A few of the additional problems *ISI Search Service* can solve are presented in Table 1.

You can use *ISI Search Service* by phone. A search specialist will discuss your project, and help you identify the precise parameters of your search. Following this initial discussion, the specialist will then get back to you with an estimate of what is available, and the probable cost of retrieving that information for you.

If you decide that you want the search done, we will usually ask for a written authorization to proceed. Upon receipt of your authorization, the search is performed, and the results are mailed to you within ten days. If you want faster service, it can be arranged, especially if you have established an account with us.

The cost of a search from *ISI Search Service* is reasonable. The minimum cost of a search is \$75, but costs vary according to what you want done. A search may involve several hundred dollars, depending on the size and complexity of the topic. If the search is too involved, you

may need to negotiate a research contract.

ISI Contract Research Service has been in operation since 1972. It is best suited for sophisticated scientometric studies, including quantitative and qualitative analyses of the structure of science, its history, the productivity of its workers and institutions, and its communications channels. Our specialists devise computer programs specifically for these projects. As I mentioned earlier, most contract customers represent organizations in government, industry, or academia, for whom a knowledge of trends in various fields is important in planning their research efforts.

ISI Contract Research Service can provide you with a report on the current state of a field as broad as polymer science and materials science, or as narrow as a medical specialty such as pathology or psychiatry. The report will provide a breakdown of the "hot" research areas, and who is doing the major research. Using our technique of cluster mapping,¹ we can indicate the direction of research in that field. These in-depth reports necessarily cover many years of data.

The final result of an *ISI Contract Research Service* project can take many forms. Depending upon whether you want raw data or analysis, you may receive a simple computer printout or a full-blown report, or both. If the project involves an evaluation of a scientific field,

cluster maps may be a part of the final package. Depending upon the timing, these reports may be similar in appearance to the minireviews included in *ISI Atlas of Science*^{TM,2}

There are few subject limitations on the scope of such contracts. In one recent project, we created a data base for the physics literature for the years 1920-1929. Through cluster analysis, we described the dynamics of physics research for that decade.³ Another ongoing project is designed to produce an evaluation of the scientific literature published in less-developed countries by studying what has been published, where it was published, and the citation records of the published work. Still another project evaluated the impact of Antarctic research sponsored by the National Science Foundation's Division of Polar Programs.⁴

Most research contracts involve a commitment of \$5,000 or more. Most projects involve three months to a year, and average six months to complete. At the outset, we work very closely with clients to determine their exact needs. Once the need is clearly understood and defined, a formal proposal is prepared by our research department. The work to be done is specified and an estimation of the cost is provided. We then negotiate a completion date, and when all terms are agreed upon, a contract is drawn up. One of the first steps in many projects is the systems analysis and programming needed to achieve the desired result. The next step in the process is the design and running of the computer program for the project. The actual running of the computer program is scheduled after preliminary testing, and then, depending upon

the scope of the project, many hours of large-scale computer processing may be involved. Then the final reports must be reviewed by the research analysts before delivery to the client.

The list of ISI's clients for both *ISI Search Service* and *ISI Contract Research Service* is impressive. It ranges from individual physicians and attorneys to marketing directors and ministers of research. We've never made a lot of noise about these services, since they've kept a small but diligent group of people quite busy. But I find that many organizations which could benefit from these services do not, simply because they are unaware of the possibilities. If either of these services sounds interesting to you, please don't hesitate to write or call.

Inquiries about *ISI Search Service* should be made to Barbara Schrieber-Coia, search service coordinator. For information on *ISI Contract Research Service*, contact H. Roberts Coward, special projects manager. Both can be reached at ISI, 3501 Market Street, University City Science Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19104. Or you can call toll-free at (800) 523-1850. In Pennsylvania, call collect at (215) 386-0100. Readers abroad can contact the offices listed at the beginning of each issue of *CC*. You can also telex your inquiries to us at 84-5305.

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