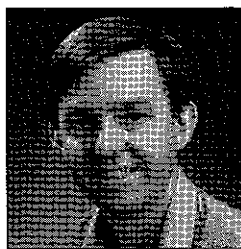


Finding Yesterday's News: A Survey of some of the Indexes and Fulltext Databases Available for Current Australian Newspapers

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Australian newspapers can sometimes provide a useful resource for legal research. Many issues are described and debated in the newspapers well before a more scholarly academic treatment appears in print, and for many current topics it may be a case of newspapers providing the *only* source of information. In a media-based culture such as ours it is perhaps disappointing that newspapers survive as the sole record, in many cases, of the current debate on a topic. Indexes to current affairs material appearing on television and on the radio are largely inadequate so newspapers often become, by default, the only accessible material from the current media.

In the not so distant past, Australian indexes for current newspapers were largely inadequate. Librarians have laboured for some time under the impression that the *Australian Public Affairs Information Service* index (better known as APAIS) produced by the National Library of Australia provided an index to the major daily newspapers. Despite the many strengths of APAIS, the comprehensive coverage of newspaper articles is not one of them. Librarians with only a passing knowledge of APAIS can hardly be blamed for putting their faith in this index for as recently as 1994 APAIS claimed to scan 'capital city dailies and the national weeklies' for feature articles within the scope of *APAIS*. The reality was that for some time, as Table 1 indicates, APAIS was not doing a very thorough scan!

As Table 1 indicates, there are no readily apparent patterns in the indexing of daily Australian newspapers in APAIS. That in 1995 only 33 articles (less than one article per week) from *The Age* merited inclusion in APAIS, indicates convincingly that APAIS cannot be relied upon to point to newspaper coverage of many issues. All that APAIS appears to do well is provide comprehensive indexing of the weekend magazines that accompany *The Age*/*The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Australian*. Whilst there may be some merit in this approach there are many problems with indexing practices which include/exclude material according to where it appears in the publication rather than, as stated in the preface, according to whether it is within the broad scope of the index.

Table 1: Records in APAIS from Australian newspapers, 1990-1995

Source	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
The Advertiser (Adelaide)	7	0	1	1	1	1
The Age	53	6	13	9	0	33
The Australian Financial Review	117	60	60	33	0	2
The Australian Magazine	96	61	88	85	76	78
Canberra Times	10	9	16	7	0	37
Courier-Mail	16	6	4	0	0	0
The Sydney Morning Herald	24	18	25	13	2	11
Good Weekend	122	75	95	90	87	75

In 1995 the indexing practices for APAIS changed and, according to the introduction to the 1995 cumulation, it is only *The Australian* which is now being scanned for feature articles that fall within the scope of APAIS. While no mention is made of *Good Weekend*, it is obviously still being indexed!

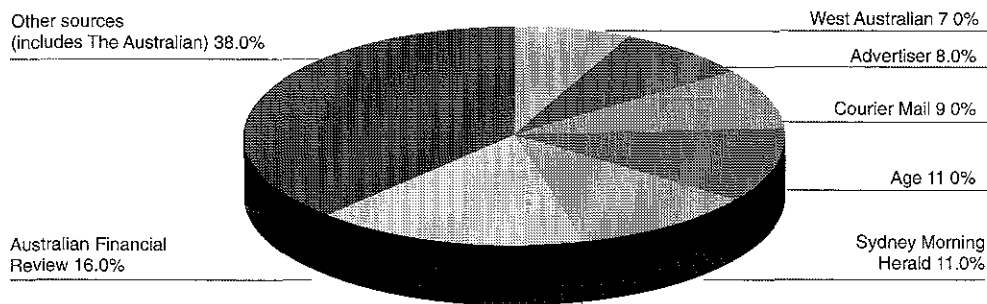
The *Australian Business Index* (known as ABIX) is available on CD-ROM and online via AUSINET, REUTERS and MAID. ABIX started life as a print product and continues to be one of the most useful indexes to newspaper articles. It commenced publication in 1981 and has increasingly become more useful, by increasing the range of titles covered and by including more information in each record. Records now include abstracts and a large number of records are added each year. Table 2 details the number of records in ABIX by year of publication.

Table 2: Records in ABIX by year of publication

Year	Number of records	Year	Number of records
1986	49,575	1991	78,108
1987	85,078	1992	72,725
1988	88,765	1993	110,176
1989	74,880	1994	139,508
1990	85,263	1995	122,515

Figure 1 indicates the percentage of records in ABIX which came from daily Australian newspapers in 1995. Note that ABIX does not provide indexing to *The Canberra Times*. ABIX now indexes a broad range of publications in addition to the capital city dailies, including *Choice*, the *Law Institute Journal*, *Australian Accountant*, and more specialised 'trade' publications such as *Australian Communications*, *Australian Mining*, *Australian Property News* and *Australian Hardware Journal*.

Figure 1: Source Documents for ABIX Year of Publication – 1995



ABIX has both strengths and limitations. It obviously concentrates on financial news and is excellent for information on companies. However, in its new format with abstracts and the facility to do free-text searching of the entire record, it offers much more than simply being an index to information about companies. It does not claim to provide cover-to-cover indexing but it provides very extensive coverage, none-the-less. In 1995, 13,644 articles (of a total of 122,515) from *The Age* were included in the database.

Full text on CD-ROM

The Fairfax newspapers (*The Age*, *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *Australian Financial Review*) are available on CD-ROM from 1992 (or in the case of *The Age* from 1993) onwards. A new disk is issued each quarter, approximately six weeks after the end of the quarter. The CD-ROM full text version of *The Age* includes feature articles, letters to the editor, editorials, and a diverse range of columns and sections, including the Business Age, Computer Age and the Property Age. A total of 111,458 records come from the 1995 issues of *The Age* and *The Sunday Age* (compare this with 13,644 articles in ABIX). Advertisements, graphs, figures, photographs and many large tables (for example share price tables) are not included. *The Age*, *The Sunday Age* and *Good Weekend* are all covered on the CD-ROM. Using Folio software, a huge range of searches is possible. It is possible, for example, to search for letters to the editor on the subject of the Hindmarsh Bridge dispute. The only limitation is that there is no subject indexing; every word in every article becomes an access point. This is both a strength and a limitation. If the question is very specific (find articles on the Dominic Simm case or the Children of God case) then the results can be very good. If the question is a general one (find articles on intellectually disabled offenders) then the results are often less satisfactory.

The great advantage of full text over indexes is the 'one stop shopping'. Having found an article, printing can be done on the spot, without the need to use microfilm or paper copies.

Also available in full text on CD-ROM is Melbourne's *The Herald-Sun*. The CD-ROM also includes the full text of the *Sunday Herald Sun* and *The Weekly Times*. Like *The Age*, all the news reports, letters to the editor and editorial comment are fully searchable and advertisements, tabular material, TV and radio listings and weather data are excluded. Archival CD-ROMs covering 1992/93, 1994 and 1995 are available and new disks are supplied on a quarterly basis. The software used in this application is Personal Librarian.

Indexes developed for the school market

With the introduction of the Victorian Certificate of Education in 1991, and the increased emphasis on research skills in secondary schools in general, a number of electronic and print newspaper services have been developed to meet the perceived demand for improved newspaper indexes. Cotter¹, in 1995, surveyed 198 post primary school libraries to determine the market share of indexes which were available at that time. She concluded that two products dominated the market *Echo* dominated the print format market (taking 80.9% of the print format subscriptions) and *Extra* dominated the computer format market (taking 86.2% of the computer format subscriptions). The main rival to *Echo* in the print market is a product called *Newscan* and the main rival to *Extra* is a product called *Mediascan*. Since the survey, the *Echo* index has become available for distribution as a disk file (updated quarterly), with weekly updates through the *Echo* Internet site.

The weekly print bulletin of *Echo* is most impressive for its currency. Issue 39, 1996 covered indexing of *The Age*, *Herald-Sun* and *The Australian* for the week 5-11 October 1996 and was available in less than two weeks (on 24 October). Also included in the weekly issues of *Echo* is an 'Issues of the week' column, covering topics such as 'Should judges have to dispense harsher sentences in line with current thinking?' and 'Should Victoria's prisons be privatised?' Each issues' column contains references to current newspaper articles and a clippings package is available for a fee.

Extra has the advantage of providing a brief summary of articles appearing in *The Advertiser*, *Courier-Mail*, *Sydney Morning Herald* and *West Australian* as well as *The Age*, *Herald-Sun* and *The Australian*. A search for articles on wheel-clamping in *Extra* located eight articles, one from the *Sydney Morning Herald*, one from *The Australian*, one from the *Herald-Sun* and five from *The Age*. The earliest reference was dated 19 January 1995 and the most recent was dated 6 December 1995. By a large margin, this index misses most of the reports of the government inquiry and the subsequent new legislation which was announced in August 1996.

¹ Cotter, T. 'Providing access to current information: An investigation into the use of electronic and print newspaper indexing services in Victorian post primary school libraries'. *Access* 9(4) November 1995 pp34-36

The Internet

There is a general feeling that, with the presence of a number of newspapers on the Internet, this will rapidly become the preferred method of accessing newspaper information. Table 3 gives some Australian newspapers on the Internet, with their Internet addresses. The National Library of Australia maintains a list of Australian newspapers at <http://www.nla.gov.au/oz/npapers.html>

Australian Internet newspaper sites focus on the current daily news and generally offer limited capacity to search through stories from previous issues. *The Sydney Morning Herald* has a searchable archival file, with stories available from 21 March 1996. However, it must be remembered that only a tiny number of stories from the daily newspapers are available on the Internet, and the archival file is equally limited.

Table 3: Australian Daily newspapers available on the Internet²

Newspaper	URL Address
The Australian	http://www.australian.aust.com/index.htm
The Sydney Morning Herald	http://www.smh.com.au/
The Age	http://www.theage.com.au/
The Australian Financial Review	http://www.afr.com.au/

A different approach is taken at the Butterworth's site known as Legal Express (<http://www.butterworths.com.au/legalexpress.htm>). It aims to cover articles of legal significance from all the major papers from the capital cities. This includes *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Australian*, *The Australian Financial Review*, *The Age*, *Courier-Mail*, *The Advertiser*, *West Australian* and *Canberra Times*. A summary of the major legal stories is prepared each day (with references to the full story), and previous bulletins can be searched. The service commenced in August 1995 so for legal stories it is only of use since this date. On the plus side, the service is free (to the extent that there are no additional charges beyond the costs associated with Internet access) and searchable. On the minus side, it is highly selective; a typical bulletin features five stories for the day. There seems to be a strong bias for articles from *The Australian Financial Review* and *The Sydney Morning Herald*. A search for articles on changes to the wheel clamping laws in Victoria did not find a reference to any articles.

One of the more useful Internet accessible indexes is *Info-Quick*. By accessing the State Library of New South Wales (<telnet://cat.slnsw.gov.au:1010>) it is possible to search an index to the Australian content of *The Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Sun Herald* and the *Good Weekend*, from 1988. This index is extremely current, with indexing appearing within a week of publication. The database contains 246,332 bibliographic records (as at 30 October 1996) and offers a number of search options. Once again, like most Internet sites it is 'free'.

² For a brief discussion see Wilson, K. *News on the Internet: Online Currents* 11(4) May 1996 pp5-6

Online services

AUSINET has for a number of years provided access to full text of *The Australian Financial Review* (full text from September 1984) and *The Sydney Morning Herald* (full text from January 1987). In May 1996, AUSINET moved from the STAIRS software to a new windows-based interface³ and introduced a new pricing structure and additional databases. The response to this change has been reported in recent issues of *Online Currents*⁴. All databases are now charged at the same hourly rate and prices per hour vary according to the amount of time purchased in advance. If you sign up to use AUSINET for one hour per month, it will cost \$3.70 per minute; if you sign up for ten hours per month the cost drops to \$1.00 per minute. The pricing structure allows for many variations; the more hours per month that you commit to, the cheaper the per minute rate becomes. In addition, a number of extra Australian newspapers are available. *The Age/Sunday Age* (from 1 January 1993), *Sun Herald* (a Sunday newspaper published in Sydney, not to be confused with Melbourne's *Herald-Sun*) (from June 1987) and the *West Australian* (from September 1996) have been added to the new service. AUSINET provides access to additional material; the ABIX referred to above, for example, is available on AUSINET.

PRESSCOM is another service which provides online access to a range of fulltext newspaper files. Like AUSINET, the pricing structure involves purchase of a block of time (rather than the pay by the minute approach taken by other online database vendors). See Table 4 for a list of the main Australian newspapers covered by PRESSCOM.

For those preferring the pay as you go approach, ILANET provides gateway access to both AUSINET and PRESSCOM files. However, for those who do not already use ILANET it must be remembered that ILANET has minimum charges of \$45.00 per month in addition to the per minute charges of the vendors. The per minute charges are generally considerably higher than the per minute costs associated with purchase of a block of time. For example, the cost per minute for access to PRESSCOM via ILANET is \$1.50 whereas the cost per minute for access direct might be as low as 50 cents per minute, depending on the type of library.

REUTERS is another service which provides access to the latest news, in full text, and a significant archival file. REUTERS provides access to *The Australian Financial Review*, *The Age* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* and ten years worth of back issues are available. From 1 December 1996 REUTERS will provide access to the *Canberra Times* and the *West Australian* also. REUTERS charges for blocks of time. The usual commercial rate for subscribers is \$575.00 for ten hours access per month.

LEXIS/NEXIS, in the ASIAPC library provides a file of Australian and New Zealand newspapers (TXTANZ). They provide access to stories from *The Age* (1988-June 1995), *The Australian Financial Review* (1989-June 1995) and *The Sydney Morning Herald* (1994-June 1995). A temporary glitch led to the loading of

³ This is reported in detail in Bale, J. "New Look! AUSINET a dazzler!" *Online Currents* 11(4) May 1996 pp 1-8-9.

⁴ Bale, J. "Fairfax launches new online initiatives ..But for AUSINET. Is the honeymoon over?" *Online Currents* 11(6) July/August 1996 pp1, 2-8-9 and Bale, J. "Fairfax replies to OLC's AUSINET Challenge" *Online Currents* 11(7) September 1996 pp 11-13.

of some stories in July 1996 but this was short-lived. LEXIS does not claim to provide cover to cover access to all stories. What was once a useful source has rapidly become an archival source of much less value.

DIALOG also provide access to a file known as Textline. On DIALOG, File 799 (Current Global News) provides access to current global news 1995-1996 and file 772 (Global News) provides access to news from 1990 to 1994 (inclusive). By use of the Journal Code field, it is possible to limit searches to specific newspapers. However, the DIALOG files share the same problems as the TXTANZ file on LEXIS/NEXIS, with no current material being added. The most recent material from *The Age* (JC=MELAGE) is dated 9 July 1996.

MAID has also suffered from the decision by Fairfax not to continue to supply the Fairfax newspapers (*The Australian Financial Review*, *The Age* and *The Sydney Morning Herald*) to other vendors. MAID provides access to older material from the Fairfax newspapers, but no current material. Overall, MAID covers around 7,000 newspapers worldwide but other than the Reuters Australian News Service (from 1985) no current Australian newspapers are presently included in full text. Note that MAID also provides access to ABIX. The pricing structure for MAID, like AUSINET and REUTERS involves bulk purchase of time (prices vary from A\$250 to A\$1250 per month).

Table 4: Dates of commencement for full text services

Newspaper	AUSINET	LEXIS/NEXIS and DIALOG	PRESSCOM	REUTERS
The Advertiser			Jan 1986	
The Age	1 Jan 1993	1988-June 1995		1985+
The Australian			Sept 1995	
The Australian Financial Review	Sept 1984	1989-June 1995		1985+
Canberra Times				1996+
Herald-Sun			Jan 1986	
Mercury			Dec 1987	
The Sydney Morning Herald	1 Jan 1987	1994-June 1995		1985+
West Australian	Sept 1996			1996+

Commercial Research Services

For those with a one-off request for information, it is worth remembering that many commercial information services will provide access to newspaper information, for a fee. La Trobe University's commercial information service (known as LASER) provides access to most of the above services and some newspapers provide their own service. *The Age* has a service known as *AgeSearch* which provides a fee-based newspaper research service covering a range of newspapers, including *The Age*.

Conclusion

In a short space of time a wide range of services have been developed for providing timely access to Australian newspaper content. The picture described above concentrates on services covering the recent past. It is no doubt incomplete. Nevertheless, it would seem that there are now a number of choices available to the researcher wishing to incorporate newspaper sources into their research. The market place described above is a crowded one. Whether indexing services and full text services can continue to co-exist remains to be seen.

The pricing structure for both online and CD-ROM services now clearly favours the regular user rather than the occasional user. Law libraries are unlikely to be large consumers of this type of information and the need remains for access to these services without the requirement to commit dollars on a monthly basis for a service that may, in fact, not be required on a monthly basis.

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