

Computerized databases are rapidly becoming one of the most important management tools in business and professions. Databases allow easy access to huge amounts of continuously updated information and often eliminate the need for time-consuming activities such as searching libraries.

The range of information available through public databases is vast — it includes news wire services, historical data, professional and technical journal abstracts, stock market data, legal and medical information, to give a few examples.

One of the most important of such "electronic libraries" in Canada is the CANSIM database, created by Statistics Canada. CANSIM, or the Canadian Socio-Economic Information Management System, includes thousands of time series, i.e. time histories of key economic and social indicators. Statistics available are on population, gross national product, manufacturing, social data and employment.

Videotex systems are becoming an important source of electronically stored information in Canada (see Telidon section). In addition, there are other information providers (distributors of databases) whose resources can be tapped through various kinds of computer systems. In some cases, virtually any computer terminal can be used to access a particular database. In other cases, clients must be users of a specific system.

QL Systems Ltd., a leading distributor of electronic databases was the first Canadian company to develop a commercial information retrieval system. QL operates over 60 databases on subjects such as government, law, news, the environment, energy, pollution, business, mining, communications and the Canadian North, among others.

*The Globe and Mail*, a Canadian newspaper sold nation-wide, operates Info Globe, a data bank of the paper's articles from the past six years. Info Globe offerings also include stock market databases, on-line access to abstracts from international news publications and access to a database on Canadian corporations developed by Canada Systems Group (CSG). CSG, a widely diversified computer services company is one of the largest in Canada.

I.P. Sharp Ltd., a major Canadian firm offering time-sharing services, makes available to its customers the world's largest on-line source of numeric databases covering mainly financial and economic subjects. The company is also expanding its services to include non-numeric data such as news bulletins.

The Canadian Institute for Scientific and Technical Information (CISTI) offers CAN/OLE (Canadian Online Inquiry System) distributing more than 20 databases mainly on scientific and technical subjects. Several Canadian databases offered by CAN/OLE are unique to this system. CISTI, is a division of the National Research Council of Canada, one of the leading federal research agencies.

Another important Canadian information provider is Dataline Inc. which offers its clients two major databases. Its Western Information System for Energy Resources (WISER) contains information on oil and gas well production over the past 20 years and is updated monthly. Another offering is an on-line, interactive stock market quotation service.

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