

APPENDIX 3: GETTING CONNECTED

COMMERCIAL DATABASES:

To connect to commercial online databases, the following are required: a computer, a modem, communications software, and the telephone number for a data communications network (e.g. Datapac, SprintNet, etc.) to connect to the online service. An online session involves a user connecting via a computer, modem, and telephone lines to a remote computer system, entering a search statement, and receiving a list of relevant database records. The database physically resides on the vendor's computer, and it is necessary to establish an account with the vendor. Each vendor can be contacted by telephone, mail, fax, or e-mail, for more detailed instructions on how to access their services. Some vendors have their own communications network, and might have several different pricing options available for accessing their system. More and more of the commercial vendors are now offering registered subscribers access to their services through their home page on the Internet.

Costs for accessing commercial databases vary, both between vendors, and also between databases. Often the cost of using a database is based on a combination of how long one is connected to the database, and how many items one looks at. For example, to access PAIS International through DIALOG, based on January 1996 prices, it costs \$30.00 (\$US) per hour to be connected to the database, and to look at the bibliographic records, it costs an addition \$0.80 (\$US) per record. Other services offer what is often referred to as "flat fee" pricing, whereby the user commits to an agreed upon amount to use the vendor's databases. Regardless of the subscription option chosen, in addition to the costs of purchasing the necessary computer, modem and communications software, there will generally be costs involved for the use of the telephone lines to connect to the commercial vendor.

To use CD-ROMs, it is necessary to have a computer and a CD-ROM reader. A CD-ROM session is done locally: the user selects the appropriate disk, puts it into his or her local computer CD-ROM reader (if the user is part of a local area network, then the CD-ROM reader may not actually reside on the user's work station), enters a search statement, and receives a list of relevant database records. In this case, unlike the online databases, the CD-ROM database is purchased outright, and is retained by the user. The price of the CD-ROM is therefore not dependant upon the number of times the purchaser might use the CD-ROM. Prices for CD-ROMs vary greatly, but generally, CD-ROMs that are updated frequently and are sold as subscriptions, are more expensive than those that are never, or seldom updated. For example, based on January 1996 prices, to purchase the Middle East Diary on CD-ROM (which is not sold as a subscription), would be \$19.95 (\$US). To purchase Jane's Defence Weekly as a CD-ROM, (which is updated monthly), would be \$600 (\$US) for an annual subscription. System requirements for CD-ROMs vary, so it is best to contact the vendor for more information on specific products. Hardware costs include a computer and a CD-ROM reader. Since this system is housed on an individual's computer, there are no telecommunications charges.