**ISAP: Index to South African Periodicals**

M. de Beer, H. van der Walt and M.A.D. de Klerk

The information society we live in generates an ever-increasing volume of information. Despite complaints about information pollution, however, very few researchers can afford not to scan continuously the literature in their fields. Articles published in journals are an important source of recent data. More than books. As noted by Lancaster, the static quality of a book is a major limitation. Apart from the time lag between the gathering of information and eventual publication, it is difficult to update once produced. Journal articles, on the other hand, provide a more immediate, up-to-date source of information in fields where today's developments could be obsolete tomorrow.

Thanks to the advent of the computer, online data searches are daily becoming faster and more effective. Periodical indexes are useful to researchers who need their information in a hurry and who have neither the time nor the money to buy and read every journal or periodical that might be relevant to their subject. Examples of such indexes are Chemical Abstracts and Science Citation Index. Local periodical literature, however, is not indexed comprehensively in international indexes. Access to articles in about 375 South African periodicals and journals may be obtained via the Index to South African Periodicals (ISAP), which is maintained by the State Library.

ISAP was launched in 1940 by the former South African Library Association. From 1945 to 1986 it was continued by the Johannesburg Public Library. In 1986 the project was transferred to the State Library in terms of a ministerial decision. Sole responsibility for the project was assumed by the State Library in 1989. To bring backlogs up to date and to speed up the work, it was decided to decentralize the indexing, according to specific fields. Experts in the various fields do the indexing on contract basis at a remuneration.

Approximately 420 South African periodicals on different subjects are indexed. The list of periodicals being indexed is reviewed regularly. From time to time lists of new titles that should be indexed are received from libraries, indexers, users and experts in the different fields. It is important to note, however, that although there are titles worth indexing, they can only be added as funds become available or when another title is cancelled. Nevertheless, attempts are made each year to add new titles to the list of periodicals to be indexed.

Indexed articles from periodicals can be grouped together into five broad subject groups, as illustrated in Fig. 1. The CSIR indexes articles on science and technology. Subdivisions in this field include agriculture, economics, architecture and marketing. Examples of periodicals indexed in this field are South African Journal of Science, South African Journal of Wildlife Research, Bulletin of Agricultural Research in Botswana and the Journal of the Namibia Scientific Society.

Articles on medical science are also included in ISAP. The responsible body is the Medical Research Council (MRC). Subjects like physiotherapy, dietetics and general health are subjected to indexing. Geneseskunde, Journal of Dietetics and Home Economics and South African Journal of Physiotherapy are good examples of periodicals indexed by the MRC.

The Human Sciences Research Council indexes articles from journals focusing on the social sciences and humanities. UNISA indexes articles on criminology, human rights, library science, law and theology. It is the responsibility of the Johannesburg Public Library to index journals of a general nature.

The ISAP data base is growing continuously and contains more than 100 000 records. The record format for each indexed item is mini-SAMARC, an adjusted format of SAMARC (South African Machine-Readable Cataloguing), which is the exchange format for bibliographic records. The mini-SAMARC format is an uncomplicated format and ensures uniformity on the data base. Libraries use their own computer programs but deliver all records in the mini-SAMARC exchange format to the State Library. Computer programs used by indexers are Inmagic and Q&A.

Each record has the following fields:
- record identifier: each record is given a unique record number or record identifier, which is used to identify a specific record;
- title: the title of the article is given here;
- author: if the article has one or more authors, it would be entered in this field;
- annotation/abstract: a short excerpt of the article, which should give an indication of who the user will be – the general public or the specialists in a certain field;
- bibliographical information: this includes the title of the periodical, year of publication, volume, issue, number and pages on which the article appears;
- subject headings: two categories can be distinguished, namely the thesaurus term, which is a standardized broad indexing term, and free-language index terms or keywords. There are 500 thesaurus terms available to choose from. They give an indication of what records are available in the broad subject field, and all records contain at least one thesaurus term that can be used to organize a possible microfiche product. The keywords, on the other hand, ensure that a user can find nearly any conceivable record; the five most important terms are normally mentioned first.

Indexed records are received regularly from all the institutions concerned, on magnetic tapes or disks in Inmagic or Q&A data base formats, and transcribed into SAMARC before delivery to the State Library. As records are received, they are sent to the State Library's computer services division. Here, records are checked for all the applicable SAMARC fields.

As ISAP developed over the years, its format changed, as indicated in Table 1. From 1987 onwards ISAP has been available on the South African Bibliographic and Information Network (Sabinet) and InfoAccess, one of the CSIR's data bases. Since 1992 ISAP has been published on CD-ROM as a joint venture of the State Library and the CSIR.

At present, ISAP is available as a general-purpose data base. The needs of par-

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The authors are on the staff of the State Library, P.O. Box 397, Pretoria, 0001 South Africa.

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### Table 1: Formats in which ISAP has been produced from 1940 to the present

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Availability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1940-79</td>
<td>✕ ✕ 1980-86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books</td>
<td>✕ ✕</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD-ROM</td>
<td>✕</td>
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<tr>
<td>Magnetic tape</td>
<td>✕</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microfiche</td>
<td>✕ ✕</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online</td>
<td>✕</td>
</tr>
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The South African Library

P.R. Coates and A.S. Kerkham*

In Cape Town is a most unusual library which, some have said, provides a reference service equal to the best in the world. Set up as a tax-supported free reference library in 1818, its aim was to 'place the means of knowledge within the reach of the youth of this remote corner of the Globe'. Today, it is one of two national libraries in South Africa — the other being the State Library in Pretoria — and functions as the national reference and preservation library.

Old by any standard, and very old by South African standards, the South African Library has collected and preserved all kinds of printed and non-printed information during the past 175 years. That makes it South Africa's oldest educational and cultural institution. It is here that the present holds discourse with the past; here the present prepares itself for the future. Its oldest book, a manuscript of the Four Gospels, dates from AD 900, yet daily it receives the very latest South African publications directly from the publishers.

Gathering and provision of facts has been the Library’s uninterrupted purpose, even obsession. The early staff knew precisely what was in its stock and where it was, but as the Library grew, finding aids and catalogues supplemented personal knowledge. Yet even today the wide knowledge of its reference librarians complements the bibliographic data available from the computer.

Throughout its history, the South African Library has been under-funded, and it could never aspire to be universal and comprehensive like the United States Library of Congress, the British Library or the French Bibliothèque Nationale. Policy decisions had to be made, and from its inception it has aimed at (and achieved) a comprehensive collection of books on southern Africa. By means of legal deposit legislation dating back to 1873, it has virtually all locally published books, periodicals and newspapers, resulting in collections which are unrivalled anywhere in the world.

Until quite recently, it also bought large numbers of books and periodicals published abroad in the fields of the humanities and literature, but with spiralling book prices and stagnant funding, the purchase of such books has been drastically cut. The one exception is the reference collection in the Reading Room, where a fine selection of up-to-date reference works is available.

The range of South African material in the Library is remarkable — from scholarly works to comic books, from newspapers to tracts and pamphlets, manuscripts and maps, and a large collection of photographs. The size of the collection is not known with certainty, but there are over 600 000 books, 45 000 volumes of newspapers, 20 000 periodical titles (many extending to hundreds of volumes), and an estimated 50 000 or more photographs.

Not only are its collections extensive, but its functions as set out in the National Libraries Act of 1985 are wide-ranging. The Library is required to:

1) build up a comprehensive collection of material from and about southern Africa;
2) collect and preserve all South African legal deposit material (including deluxe editions), and collect and preserve rare and unique material;
3) process its collections and make them available for use;
4) act as a central reference library, making its collections available for reference purposes, publishing them and displaying them;
5) act as a central reference library, making its collections available for reference purposes, publishing them and displaying them;
6) act as a national preservation library to preserve legal deposit material and rare and unique material, and render a restoration service at a national level;
7) maintain liaison with libraries and other institutions in and outside the Republic.

The Library's reference service is the activity most obvious to the public, but behind the scenes there are many other activities taking place. For example, as part of its retrospective bibliographic work, the Library is the compiler of the South African Bibliography to the Year 1925, which was published in 1979 and replaced Sidney Mendelssohn's famous South African Bibliography. Recently, a 10-year supplement was produced and work continues on subject and title indexes.

The Library is also a publisher in its own right, and recent successful publications have been Lady Herschel: Letters from the Cape, 1834–1838 and The Khokhlo at the Cape of Good Hope.

An extensive microfilming programme covers not only current filming of titles such as Die Burger, but also the filming of fragile items for preservation purposes. The latter includes the official publications of the Cape of Good Hope, many of which were printed on poor paper and are not easily obtainable.

To publicize its collections and activities, the Library regularly holds exhibitions and symposia, although these activities have been hampered by building renovations in recent months. Popular exhibitions have included ‘Shipwrecks of South Africa’ and an exhibition of photographs ‘Cape Town in the 30s’. A Bibliophiles’ Symposium is held approximately every five years and another recent symposium was on ‘Book publishing in South Africa for the 1990s’. The published proceedings of these symposia represent important contributions to the literature on librarianship in this country, and some are prescribed reading for university students.

This abundance of information and services is available to researchers substantially free of charge, thanks to a State subsidy currently touching R5 million.

The Library is in Queen Victoria Street, Cape Town. *Address for correspondence: P.O. Box 496, Cape Town, 8000 South Africa.