CABI Publishing – from Print to Internet

CABI Publishing is now an International, not-for-profit publisher, producing and distributing a wide range of printed and electronic information resources in the area of agriculture and related applied life sciences. With users in over 150 countries around the world, CABI Publishing is now one of the leading publishers in its field.

CABI Publishing began, as an organization, in 1928, with the bringing together of over 12 individual information centres from around the United Kingdom. Known then as the Commonwealth Agricultural Bureaux, it's main publishing role was the production of nearly 30 printed abstracting journals covering broad, agricultural related subject areas. These titles were generally subscribed to by large universities and government research institutes. In the late 1960's secondary publishers began looking at computerised production processes and, by 1972, CABI too was testing out the computer production of two of its abstract journals. By 1973 all the abstracting journals were being electronically produced. At the same time, users began demanding more and more subject focused materials and so CABI began to publish a series of more subject specific abstracting journals, many of which, like Rice Abstracts, Maize Abstracts, etc., were sponsored by funding agencies for bulk distribution, specifically to developing countries.

In the mid 1970s, the computer production of the journals led to the introduction of vendored, online services through partnerships with people like Dialog and SDC Orbit, many of whom are still offering these services today. In the early days, such services were slow and expensive and required training to use them. They were very much services for the professional searcher. In the mid 1980s, CD-ROM technology meant that Databases could be distributed more widely in electronic form, free from the need for expensive and often unreliable telecommunications. For the first time, this new technology, with its "user-friendly" search software, meant that access to databases was available to end users. CAB ABSTRACTS was the first of the CABI Publishing's CD-ROM offerings and was made available as CABCD with SilverPlatter software for stand-alone use. Then, with the introduction of multiple CD-ROM players, Windows-based search software and the expansion of computer networks, networking of CD-ROM databases to end-user's workstations became the norm and the role of librarians and information intermediaries began to change.

As the internet developed and the number of CD-ROM based databases increased, thoughts turned to delivering these database remotely via the Web. This offered savings in time and effort as librarians and information specialists no longer had to spend time managing ever increasing archives of CD-ROMs. Suddenly, the traditional Online services and the CD-ROM services had met one another in the middle with a bewildering number of services from an equally bewildering number of service providers.

Electronic production of databases also meant that the manipulation of the data was easy. With advances in the production technology and the search interfaces, it was no longer necessary to offer just CAB ABSTRACTS on a "take it or leave it" basis. CABI Publishing was able to introduce a series of database subsets on CD-ROM and the Web. Known as the Spectrum series, these titles were smaller, more specialised and were available at more affordable prices for institutions with more specific subject interests. In the mid 1980s, CABI also introduced a new Human Health database to its collection; CAB HEALTH.

As information services became more and more widely available to end-users, their perception of information changed. As the internet developed and became faster, so users began to expect more and more from information providers like CABI Publishing; more information, better quality and faster. They also began looking for services that gave them more than a simple list of references. They began looking for sites that would provide full text and answers to problems. So began CABI's development of their Community Web sites. These subject focused Communities offer more than just database access with reviews, news, calendars of events and discussion groups. In parallel with the development of the Communities, CABI also embarked on an ambitious programme to develop a series of electronic Compendia; encyclopaedic problem solving tools that offer users practical answers to real questions. Developed initially as CD-ROM products, these compendia are also now available via the Web.

Over the years, the role of secondary databases, like CAB ABSTRACTS and CAB HEALTH, has changed. Full text linking is now the order of the day. Electronic bibliographic database now have an important role to play as one-stop indexes pointing to electronic full-text. CABI Publishing now work with numerous partners including ISI, Ovid, EBSCO, Dialog and Ingenta to build full text linking to as much of the available full text as possible. Both databases have recently been rebuilt and are a presently being reloaded with the vendors. The new version of the database now contains author's e-mail addresses, URLs for Web-based articles and Digital Object Identifiers to aid in the location of the original materials. The new version of CABDirect, CABI Publishing's own version of CAB ABSTRACTS, will also be Open Url and SFX compliant which will allow users to tailor their own full text linking.

In addition to database publishing, CABI Publishing also has an expanding book and primary journal publishing programme. All the books and primary journals are also now available in electronic form

Like most other publishers, CABI Publishing is constantly changing with the development of technology and changes in users needs. It's an exciting and a busy time for all of us.