

ACCESS AND USE ISSUES FOR JUDAIC DATABASES

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Description: Some discussion points: One drive, many CDs: mapping and CD towers; Choosing type of access, which to load on hard drive, software conflicts; Security: physical devices and codes; Printing problems over the network; Patron expectations and education; Network version, site licensing, and multiple copies of single use CD; Problems allowing access to original CD.

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First, let me explain the ways that we make the various CD databases available to our patrons. Most of the CDs are housed in a reserve cage. Use is on one of two public access computers; the operating system of one is Windows 98 and the other has Hebrew Windows 95. Ideally, each CD would be installed on one or the other (occasionally both) of the computers, and an icon placed on the desktop. The patron would sign out the CD and manual from the Circulation Desk, insert in drive, click on icon, and she's off. Knowledgeable and computer savvy patron finds exactly what she's looking for, prints out results, and leaves as a satisfied customer. We

also have some of the more frequently requested CDs available from the two networked CD towers, yielding a total of 13 CD drives. These drives can be made available from any computer on the network, in effect creating 13 [additional] CD drives on any computer. In theory, this sounds great; in reality it is somewhat less ideal than the scenario described above. The only difference for patron access is that only the manual would be signed out from the reserve cage, not the actual CD.

Currently, we have 117 CDs available to our patrons, plus a very limited number of subscribed databases over the internet. These have been acquired because they fit within our collection development parameters, not because of specific user requests. But availability in no guarantee of actual use-ability or use. Not every CD is cataloged, much less currently usable. Almost all are single user licenses. Can you imagine the conflicts if over 100 Judaic databases were installed on our two computers? Current practice is to make an educated guess which CDs are likely to be requested, install the needed software (not always successfully) and hope it is still functional when actually used. Our librarians have been able to familiarize themselves with some of the less transparent databases, but the patron might be left on their own. Assistance is always available, but we cannot guarantee that the available librarian will be knowledgeable about all of the ins and outs, search strategies, and idiosyncrasies of a particular database. Fortunately, the interface is fairly user friendly and intuitive for most, especially those that do not require construction of sophisticated search requests.

Worst case scenario has happened one of three ways, and worst is really not so terrible. Scenario One: A patron requests a database that is not installed. The choice is either to wait, hopefully no more than a couple of hours, or to see if another resource can supply the needed information. Scenario Two: A database that worked perfectly when installed or last used no longer functions properly. This could be the result of a conflict from another installation, network or operating system changes or upgrades that have unexpected ramifications, or patrons, whether inadvertently or deliberately, making changes that have results similar to authorized changes/upgrades. Scenario Three: For no discernable reason, the database does not work any more. Best solution after all troubleshooting efforts meet with failure is to uninstall and reinstall the software.

Installation itself is often problematic. Older CDs may be unable to recognize any drive but d:\ as a source. Some computers may have the hard drive partitioned into two or more sections; this is a legacy from earlier operating systems being incapable of handling so much memory – no longer necessary but still encountered. The resulting name of the CD drive (e:\, f:\, etc.) can be a problem, and so can those 13 virtual drives from the CD towers. Theoretically, I know it's possible to do lots of renaming and edit the Windows registry, but there are some things best left to the Information Systems folks. Also, some software is very touchy about the order it is installed; this was especially true of some of the earlier versions of Bar Ilan. And, of course, there are the security hasps, which all want to be first or last in the serial port. But the CD tower may not have a serial port, or the one that exists may not be recognized by the software. We have an additional problem with the security hasps because of how the CDs are signed out for use. The users may not realize that they are required, don't know how or where to attach them, and may forget to remove and return them with the CD.

No network version exists for most of the CD databases, even though we would prefer that option. If you have public access computers, and not “just” secure network installations of the databases, then you might have security software installed on the PCs. Fortress is used in our Library, but we cannot get it to work with Hebrew Windows. This software, while doing what is needed, can create conflicts – restricted access to various functions such as writing even a temp file to the hard drive or blocking internet access may completely disable a database.

I just stated that no network version exists for many of our databases. I am not attempting access outside of the wired campus, only within the intranet. It would be preferable to have the possibility of access from anywhere on campus. For most of the databases it is not a problem since the level of use is anticipated to be minimal, and certainly no more than one simultaneous user. But for those that are used often, or that a faculty member may want access to from a study or classroom, access not restricted to a particular physical location would be tremendously beneficial both for research and teaching.

One database, *Encyclopadia Judaica*, is available over the network. A network version with five simultaneous user licenses, was purchased and installed on the Citrix server almost at the very beginning, and the access software is installed on the PC of every Library staff member who needs it to fulfill job responsibilities. We also provide access for faculty members in their studies, for other departments as needed, and through the public access computers and dumb

terminals in the Library. It is even available through dial-in access, but, depending on speed of access, may not be worth using.

We have purchased Bar Ilan 9, network version for five simultaneous users for each of our three US campuses. [Up until yesterday, no one has been able to improve on local, single-user access.] We followed the instructions, and the PC works perfectly as a single-user installation. Even after trying anything and everything, including renaming drives and editing the Windows registry, we have had no success. Our Jerusalem campus had installed an earlier version both in the Library and at the computer lab. I've emailed the local IS technician and am waiting for some sage advice. When I wrote to Batya Kaplan, our Jerusalem librarian, and asked if the Hebrew directions were any better than the English version, she replied that a translation would not be helpful since they were even worse! Bar Ilan has not yet responded to a request for assistance. If the database was not of such high quality and in such high demand, I would recommend abandoning the network installation. Of course, it is possible to successfully install Bar Ilan 9. But for us, this database has already cost thousands of dollars and is not yet fully functional.

Phil Miller, our NY Librarian, informed me at convention that his IS technician claims success; this has not been independently verified.¹

Let me give you some more examples from our experience at the Klau Library, Cincinnati.

Old Testament Abstracts -- Works fine when installed, but rarely if ever for the patrons. We finally had to disable the security software before it would work. The reason it worked after installation appears to have been related to merely logging off rather than shutting down the computer. At least that's the only explanation I've been able to fabricate.

BibleWorks – We're up to version 5 since this is somewhat heavily used by our graduate students. It is suggested to download the contents of the disk to the hard drive to speed up access; the CD is still required and I detect no difference in speed of access.

Dead Sea Scrolls – is almost a success story. All three CDs are located in one of the towers, drives were successfully mapped, installation proceeded seamlessly. So where is the problem? I tried to install the separate use software for CD #3 on a Win 98 instead of 95 machine, and it doesn't work properly. The company agrees with me; it doesn't work with this setup.

Henkind Talmud Database – This actually works fine, but only on a Hebrew Windows operating system – not Hebrew enabled. The only reason I mention this is that sometimes it's the really small stuff that trips you up. It's necessary to have access to a telephone for an unlocking code during installation. Physical proximity to a phone was a real problem, as well as different office hours and staff un-availability.

Masterdaf – The last database that I'll mention. This is a subscription that I purchased with my credit card over the internet for our Library. Everything works beautifully and the faculty

¹ The database has since been successfully installed on all three campuses and is working perfectly. We disregarded portions of the installation instructions and proceeded intuitively to achieve success.

member will be pleased. Each tractate will be available immediately after release, and we have a fixed yearly expense. Granted, we had to create an email alias since that is how user id is verified. Any mail actually comes to me, and it should be only renewal notices. There's even an option to download MP3 files for a minimal charge. The audio component is available on the website, but if you want to study Talmud anytime, anywhere... But then I tried to remove my credit card info and this rendered the subscription inoperable. Customer support directed me to email a request. Meanwhile, the database is unavailable and the clock is ticking.²

Each new electronic resource brings unique issues and conflicts, to say nothing of functionality challenges. Our Library has found various interim solutions, mainly dictated by the idiosyncrasies of the particular database. Our primary concern is the needs of our users, especially the students. To that end, informal guidelines have evolved.

- A. Purchase quickly. The CD may no longer be available in a few months.
- B. Make our best guess for ease of accessibility.
- C. Attempt to gain some expertise with the resources.
- D. Be responsive to user suggestions and requests.

We have many electronic resources, primarily CDs, that are in various stages of cataloging, accessibility, and usability. The above guidelines do appear to work well for us. While more than merely adequately serving the user population, we are also able to conserve our most limited resources – staff time and expertise.

² The problem has been resolved with customer support.