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Off of the Paper... onto the WWW & CD-ROM

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Chemistry--the science of medicines, plastics, detergents, and just about all other materials in everyday life--is increasingly an information-based science. Chemists conduct experiments, study properties, and gather data to develop new reactions, create new medicines and materials, and improve on what we already have. As a result, more and more chemists need time-saving information utilities for their everyday work. Many use ChemInfo for quick reference to data about reactions, properties, safety, and commercial availability of chemicals.

In the previous issue of the Catalyst, we reviewed the trend towards electronic chemical catalogs, which not only save time in locating suppliers, but also enable searching for a chemical using its structure. An initial group of major chemical suppliers worked with CambridgeSoft to create ChemACX, a combined catalog with over 100,000 distinct chemical entities. Four of those companies have now produced their own electronic catalogs using ChemOffice as the drawing and searching software.

Structure Searchable Electronic Chemical Catalogs			
Supplier	Software	Medium	Web URL
ACROS Organics	ChemOffice	CD	www.acros.be
Fisher Scientific	ChemOffice	CD	www.fisher1.com
Lancaster	ChemOffice	WWW	www.lancaster.co.uk
TCI America	ChemOffice	CD	www.tciamerica.com

How do these electronic catalogs save chemists time? Suppose you need to find out whether Acros has anhydrous piperazine in kilogram quantities, or you want to look up Lancaster's catalog number and price for 6-methylquinoline before going to your purchasing office. What if you need to identify suppliers of certain chemicals, or you want to know about available chemicals similar to one that interests you? Answering these

questions with a shelf full of thick paper catalogs could be tedious, but with a supplier's catalog on CD-ROM, WWW, or ChemACX, each question takes just seconds.

In the Words of Chemical Suppliers

Now suppose you're a chemical supplier. You want potential customers to look in your catalog first. If your customers are among the large and growing number of chemists with computers, you'll want to put your catalog in their hands in an electronic format. That's why leading chemical suppliers are creating CD-ROM and Web-based catalogs using brand-name software that many chemists already know.

According to Paul D'hondt, Senior Product Manager at Acros Organics, *"We wanted to make it as easy as possible for our European customers to locate the products they need, so we based our electronic catalog on CambridgeSoft's ChemOffice."*

Or, as Mr. Masa Isono, President of TCI America explains, *"Since ChemOffice is so widely installed in Japan, we decided to use it to create our TCI America electronic catalog. This presents our products in a structure-searchable format that appeals to the chemists who are our customers."*

Putting timely information into the hands of customers is another motivation to bring chemical catalogs into the electronic age. J. Scott Shaffer, Vice President and General Manager for Lancaster Synthesis, U.S., sees it this way: *"Our line of over 14,000 products, many unique to Lancaster, is always growing. The structure-searching mechanism of ChemOffice on our Web site will really make these products come alive. We anticipate that this new feature will dramatically speed the discovery process."*

Mailing a ChemOffice-based electronic catalog sends a special message to customers, as John Fusco, Product Manager at Fisher Scientific notes: *"To better assist customers, Fisher Scientific strives to utilize the best new technology to present our products and services. In this case, that's the ChemOffice-based 1998/99 ACROS Organics Catalog of Fine Chemicals, which we will send to thousands of scientists in industry and research."*

In addition to the "private" catalogs shown in the Table above, the catalogs of other leading companies, such as Alfa Aesar, Maybridge, and Sigma-Aldrich can be found in ChemOffice format as part of ChemACX. Many more catalogs are on the way in future releases of ChemACX and through the WWW-based information service described on the next page.

ChemInfo WebServer-- WWW Information

With information sources spread throughout the world--and their

volume growing daily--many people don't want the burden of organizing and updating numerous databases, and amassing information centers in their offices, labs, and homes. Just as you visit libraries instead of buying every book that's published, you can use the World Wide Web to visit "electronic libraries" where information is gathered, checked, organized, updated, and presented by professionals in the business.

That's exactly why more than 50,000 chemists have been using CambridgeSoft's ChemFinder WebServer for over two years (see "[Site of the Month](#)" in issue 5.3 of the Catalyst). Now, those seeking WWW chemical information can come to www.camsoft.com for a new premier service, the ChemInfo WebServer. It's a chemical information subscription service currently comprising over 75,000 chemicals with links to WWW-resident information about them. For \$49 for a one-year subscription, or just \$29 for a 90-day trial, you get the ChemDraw Plugin to help create structure and substructure queries; you also get priority service on a dedicated server, and a 10-fold increase in the maximum size of a hit-list returned by a query. The ChemFinder WebServer continues to be free to anyone who registers at www.camsoft.com, even as the new subscription service picks up membership.

How do chemists use this new WWW information service? A recent survey of registered users found industrial and academic scientists--and students too--searching the ChemInfo WebServer for various reasons. Some were looking for links to environmental health and safety information; others needed toxicology data. Some just wanted to verify a structure, a CAS Registry Number, a synonym, or a melting point. Usage ranged from once a week to 50 or more searches a day.

Soon other chemical information databases will be added; for example, the chemical supplier catalogs of ChemACX will be available as another service of the ChemInfo WebServer. As new suppliers make their catalog data available, the number of companies represented and the breadth of the chemicals listed will grow. Other information, such as the reactions, properties, and Material Safety Data Sheets currently available only in ChemInfo Ultra, will also be added over time.

As the consumer, you choose the chemical information source and form that is right for you. You can have the packaged convenience of ChemInfo Ultra, with a CD-ROM library of information available at your desktop computer. Or you can take advantage of the frequently updated contents of the ChemInfo Web Server. Or both!

Footnote: This article was first published in the CS Catalyst. Check it out at: www.camsoft.com

Comments

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