

The Information Advisor[™]

A M O N T H L Y N E W S L E T T E R

Analysis, Advice, and Strategy
for the Knowledge Professional

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Alacra: Snazzy, Upscale and a Feature-Filled New Model

The new Alacra. Is that a luxury import, or an information firm?

If you're not sure, your confusion is understandable. You may already be aware that Alacra is an information firm, but you probably know the company by its previous name: .xls Data Downlink. That company made a name for itself as a provider of in-depth business information that could easily be downloaded onto a spreadsheet. It also was known for its collection of high-quality, hand-selected business Web sites, called PortalB (which we reviewed quite positively in our December, 2000 issue, Volume 12, No 12, p.1*).

Today, the firm is known as Alacra (www.alacra.com). It is an independent company, financed by venture capital, and has expanded its information offerings to business. The downloadable business data and those hand-selected business Web sites are still available, but last year Alacra added a new and interesting feature called "Alacra Book," which we review in this article.

Alacra Book allows users to create a neatly formatted PDF report on any of the 30,000 or so public companies that are contained in the 80+ databases aggregated by Alacra. As such, it competes with other "all-in-

Alacra Book is incredibly simple to use, but is very powerful and includes excellent sources

one" preformatted business information products that aggregate from multiple databases, such as SkyMinder, Company Dossier from LexisNexis, and OneSource (see the source comparison table on pp. 3-4).

WHAT'S INSIDE THE BOOK

The sources and databases that users can select to create their Alacra Book include many well-known and leading news and financial online services and content providers. For instance, there are many Thomson Financial sources such as Investext (Alacra includes the entire file from

the past five years), Extel Cards, I/B/E/S Analyst Estimates, Mergers & Acquisitions, New Issues, and Ownership Data. There are also market research report publishers like Datamonitor and Freedonia; studies from the international business intelligence firm EIU; and news from Business & Industry, BAMP and a linkup into Factiva's news content. (For a full listing of the databases included, go to www.alacra.com and see the source listing under the "databases" tab).

THE SEARCH PROCESS

We found our searches to be simple and fast - all we had to do was enter a company name or ticker symbol. We were then shown a listing of databases that contained information on the target firm, with a check-off box next to each database. The beauty of this system is that it automatically does the internal searching and filtering of the databases against your company for you, so all that is left for you to do is pick and choose which databases'

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items you want included in your book.

When we clicked a box next to a database, we were then shown the specific item(s) from within that database that contained data on the target firm, along with a per item price. (See sample screen shot on page 5).

In some cases, we were able to view an abstract (for news items) or a table of contents record (for market research or Investext reports). This was helpful in making a determination as to whether or not we wanted to add that item to the book we were building.

We continued clicking on databases to add pieces as desired. As we were doing this, we were able to view a running total of how much our book was costing us. We also had the option at any time while building the book to delete an item that we had previously selected.

When we were finished and satisfied that our book included what we desired, we clicked on the "submit" button. We then entered an email address and within a few minutes we were sent a message with a specific URL where we could "pick up" our Alacra book, formatted neatly and cleanly as a PDF document. Nothing could have been simpler.

In addition to its simplicity, we found several very useful and thoughtful features that add to this service's value.

- You can set up the service to recognize any existing arrangements you already have in place with your content vendors so that you are not charged when you choose to add content from that vendor.

Furthermore, you can enter a project code so that you can track how much you are buying from those content

providers for your own internal record-keeping purposes.

- Administrators may choose which databases in Alacra will be displayed and permissioned to users, customizable to each individual user.

- Users can save their searches as a template, and then refresh them with new information whenever new data on the target company becomes available.

- Users can use a table of contents feature to determine the order in which the various data sources appear in the Alacra book.

- Users may add their own proprietary content to their book, whether it's a Word document, PDF, PowerPoint or other common file. All that's needed is to click a button to upload the file from your hard disk to the book as you are creating it.

PRICING

The subscription fee is based on a per-seat license for Alacra and Alacra Book. Alacra costs \$150 per month for the first seat and \$500 for 10 users. There is no cost to run a search, only to download data.

Note that subscribers also have access to the other Alacra components: Alacra Search (the Web-only collection previously called PortalB) and Alacra Premium, which is the searchable collection of the databases in Alacra.

OVERALL EVALUATION

We really liked this product—it is both very powerful, because of its excellent content, and incredibly simple to use. It's also a good example of how an automated system can be used to improve the search process. Unlike a conceptual search that requires human intelligence and intervention, a straightforward company search is not open to much interpretation, and so can effectively

be automated and run in the background, as Alacra has done, to speed up the search and still return on-target results.

Our only complaint is that Alacra was sometimes slow to construct our book. And, while not really a complaint so much as a caution, it can be tempting to think that using Alacra means you are covering all your business research bases. But, like any business information service, you don't get "everything" under one roof and indeed the actual count of the number of companies covered by Alacra is relatively small. But if you want news and financials for public firms, Alacra is an excellent product.

COMPETING SOURCES

To help you compare the databases available on Alacra to sources featured by competing services providing similar all-in-one business reports, we have created a chart on pages 4-5 that lists and compares which database is available on which service.

We have compared databases on Alacra with those on key competitors – LexisNexis' Company Dossier, OneSource's Business Browser (Global edition), and SkyMinder. (Another competitor would be Thomson's Global Access, however Thomson has told us that it is in the midst of revamping this product, and so could not provide information.)

One caution in using this chart: although we have standardized the names of databases, in some cases we needed to list the names used by the individual online services, so there is sometimes not an equivalent on a competing service. This is primarily true for some of Company Dossier, which names files specific to LexisNexis. Still, the table will give you a good sense of what you get from each of these competitors. ■

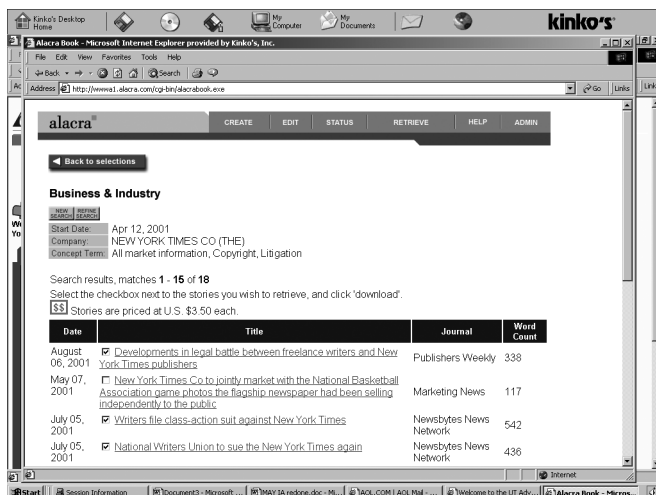
(See comparison table on pages 4-5)

Databases Included in Alacra and Key Competitors

	Alacra	Company Dossier	OneSource Business Browser	SkyMinder
TOTAL COMPANIES COVERED	30000	500,000+	370,000+ (Global Edition)	33 million
U.S. vs. GLOBAL COVERAGE (As Available by Vendor)	U.S.: 12,600 Japan: 2,859 U.K.: 2,351 Spain: 1,284 France: 1,084 Germany: 950 Malaysia: 794 HK: 836 (Rest of world: remainder)	U.S.: 98% Western Europe: 1% Rest of world: 1%	N.A.	U.S.: 13 million Europe: 15 million Rest of world: 5 million
NAME OF DATABASE/SOURCE:				
AFX			X	
America's Corporate Finance Directory		X		
Argus—The Owners Service	X			
Barra Beta Books	X			
Business & Management Practices	X			
Capital Access International	X			
Combined Federal & State Trademarks		X		
Commonwealth & Irish Cases, Combined		X		
Company Intelligence—U.S.		X		
Comtex			X	X
CorpTech	X		X	
Datamonitor Reports	X			
Directory of Corporate Affiliations		X		
Disclosure Public Co. Profiles		X		
Dun & Bradstreet			X	X
EBSCO Information Services	X			
EDGAR	X	X		
EIU City/Country Information Services	X			
Euromonitor	X		X	
European Patents		X		
Extel Card Database	X	X		
Factiva	X			
Freedonia	X			
FT Interactive Data	X			
FT.com			X	
Gale Market Share Reporter	X			
Globe Information	X			
Graham & Whiteside	X			X
GSI				X
Harris InfoSource	X		X	
Hoover's		X		X
Hoppenstedt				X
ICC Financial Analysis Reports	X	X		
IdEXEC	X			
Integra Information				X
Investext	X	X	X	
IPO Data Systems	X			

Databases Included in Alacra and Key Competitors

NAME OF DATABASE/SOURCE:	Alacra	Company Dossier	OneSource Business Browser	SkyMinder
Jordans			X	X
KSV				X
Mailings Clearing House			X	
Market Guide	X		X	X
MarkIntel	X			
MCM CorporateWatch	X			
Media General Financial Services	X			
Mergent	X		X	
Mergerstat	X	X		
Multex Global Estimates	X			
National Post of Canada			X	
Nelson Information	X	X		
News Group File of LexisNexis		X		
NIKKEI	X			
ORT				X
Patent Abstracts of Japan		X		
Perfect Information	X			
ProQuest			X	
Quest Economics	X			
RDS Journals	X		X	X
RM			X	
SEC Forms (10-K, 10-Q, 20-F, Proxy, Williams Act Filings)		X		
Standard & Poors		X		
Tech-Line from CHI Research	X			
The Executive Directories		X		
Thomson Financial: I/B/E/S; Industry Insider; Joint Ventures; Mergers & Acquisitions; New Issues; Ownership Data; Venture Economics; Carson	X			
Today's News Sources		X		
U.S. Business Directory		X		
U.S. Copyrights		X		
U.S. & European Patents		X		
Vickers Securities Report				
VNU			X	
Wiesenberger	X			
Worldscope International		X	X	
WorldVest Base	X			
Zacks Investment Research		X		



A search on The New York Times Company on ALACRA returned these results in the Business & Industry news database