

Alacra: Trying Harder



WHERE ALACRA

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TO WORKING

WITH

INTERNAL LIBRARY AND

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

DEPARTMENTS.

By Jan Davis Tudor

Maybe Alacra [www.Alacra.com] should license the Avis slogan "We Try Harder." Avis launched its famous advertising slogan to make a virtue of its number-two position in the car rental industry and to publicize the company's commitment to customer service and continuous improvement. I think Alacra can relate. Even though the company may not have the name recognition of its larger competitors, it has successfully found its place in the competitive business database world by continually adding databases and creating research tools to help business professionals.

One way Alacra tries harder is with its Alacra Book. The Alacra Book tool was developed in 2001 in response to the needs of investment banks in their daily preparation of public information books (PIBs), also known as briefing or pitch books. Instead of having to create a PIB from scratch, that is, manually gathering documents and compiling them into a notebook, Alacra provides the ability to create a PIB electronically. The Alacra Company Book was so popular with investment banks, consultancies, and law firms that the company has since developed the Industry Book and Country Book.

TRYING HARDER BY ADDING VALUE

Where Alacra really adds value is in its commitment to working with internal library and information technology departments. The "build a book" template can be completely customized for your firm or department. You can get extremely specific when designing the list of databases available for building Alacra Books. For example, if you select Thomson Financial's Investext database, you can pre-determine which investment banks are included in your search results.

Alacra realizes the reality of corporate budgets for information and the fact that one information provider can't provide it all. So Alacra has set up a system in which searchers can search other database services licensed by their firms, such as LexisNexis and Factiva. Thus, Alacra provides seamless access, using a firm's al-

ready existing subscription to another service, so the searcher doesn't have to search the two services separately. LexisNexis is available only in Alacra Book, but Factiva is available in both Alacra Book and the regular Alacra service. Both LexisNexis and Factiva require a subscription; there is no pay-per-view access.

Alacra will also work with its customers so that researchers can add proprietary data from their own local or network drive, loading it as a secure directory on the Alacra server. The Alacra Book then contains data from both Alacra and the researcher's firm.

COMPANIES, INDUSTRIES, COUNTRIES

An Alacra Company Book can be created for over 32,000 global companies, and the data you can include in your book includes but is not limited to company financial data, current and historic news, sections of SEC filings, shareholder data, scanned images from annual reports, merger and acquisition data, company home pages, and investment bank reports. The full list of over 100 databases can be found at Alacra's Web site. Most recently added were Global Insight, Meridien Securities Markets, and Mintel.

The Alacra Industry Book can be created by selecting an industry cate-

gory or based on a keyword query. What I find particularly useful with the Industry Book template is the ability to take advantage of Alacra's powerful indexing system, which links each and every document to Alacra's authority file.

An Alacra Country Book can be created for 100 countries. The type of data included in country books ranges from news to economic surveys to political risk reports. Because no company or industry works in a vacuum, you can append an industry book or country book to a company book. For example, if you are creating an industry book on the global cellular telecommunications industry, you can attach country books you've created on relevant countries.

BUILDING A BOOK

It's easy to build an Alacra Book. For example, when creating an Industry Book on the Alacra template, you assign your book a title, search by keyword and/or industry, add a project code, and away you go. You can limit the search by concept codes, such as "market share," "industry forecasts" and "patent/trademark," and country codes. This filtering capability is particularly helpful in the industry book, where researchers could be overwhelmed by the amount of data available for a given industry.

The screenshot shows a web browser window titled "Alacra Industry Book - Microsoft Internet Explorer provided by Comcast High-Speed Internet". The address bar shows "http://wwwa5.secure.alacra.com/cgi-bin/alacrabook.exe". The page features a navigation bar with "alacra" logo and buttons for "CREATE", "EDIT", "STATUS", "RETRIEVE", "HELP", and "ADMIN". Below the navigation bar, there are links for "Create a Company Book" and "Create an Industry Book". The "Create an Industry Book" section includes a description: "Alacra Industry Book collects and combines documents electronically, assembles them into a comprehensive book and makes the book accessible as a single Adobe PDF document." It then prompts the user to "Choose an Industry and/or Keyword" and "Filter Results using Concept/Country". The "Choose an Industry" dropdown menu is open, showing options: "None", "Aerospace & Defense", and "Agricultural Chemicals". The "Choose Concept" dropdown menu is also open, showing options: "Any", "Demographics", and "Employee/Labor Relations". The "Choose Country" dropdown menu is open, showing a list of countries including "Africa", "Algeria", "Angola", "Benin", "Botswana", "Burkina Faso", "Burundi", "Cameroon", and "Cape Verde". There are input fields for "Enter Name of Book", "Book Title", and "Keyword", and a "Bill to Project" field. A "Start" button is located at the bottom of the form.

You can limit the search by concept codes, such as "market share," "industry forecasts" and "patent/trademark," and country codes.

Once you input your search terms, Alacra searches the databases and displays the results in the default “Express Book” format. The Express Book feature was originally designed for the senior partner and/or managing director who doesn’t have the time to perform extensive searches and read through a long list of results. But since it became so popular with a variety of searchers, it is now the default setting. A search in Express Book typically retrieves only the top hits from each database searched, with the results displayed on one page. If you prefer to view more than five hits per category, you can change the default setting.

Regardless of what setting you choose for viewing the retrieved hits, Alacra gives you the ability to add just the data you want into your book. For example, if I retrieve a 10-K filing on a particular company, I can drill down the contents of the filing and select just the portion I want, such as Item 1. The same approach can be applied to a particular page of a Freedonia market research report.

You can leave your book in edit mode to work on later. Additional hardware

A SEARCH IN
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ON ONE PAGE.

or software is not needed because Alacra performs all of the publishing electronically. The books can support a variety of formats, including word-processing, spreadsheet, picture, and presentation formats.

PAYING FOR IT

There is no additional fee for Alacra subscribers to build a book, and an annual subscription to Alacra is \$150 per seat per month. Once an Alacra subscriber, you have two payment options for using the Alacra book tool:

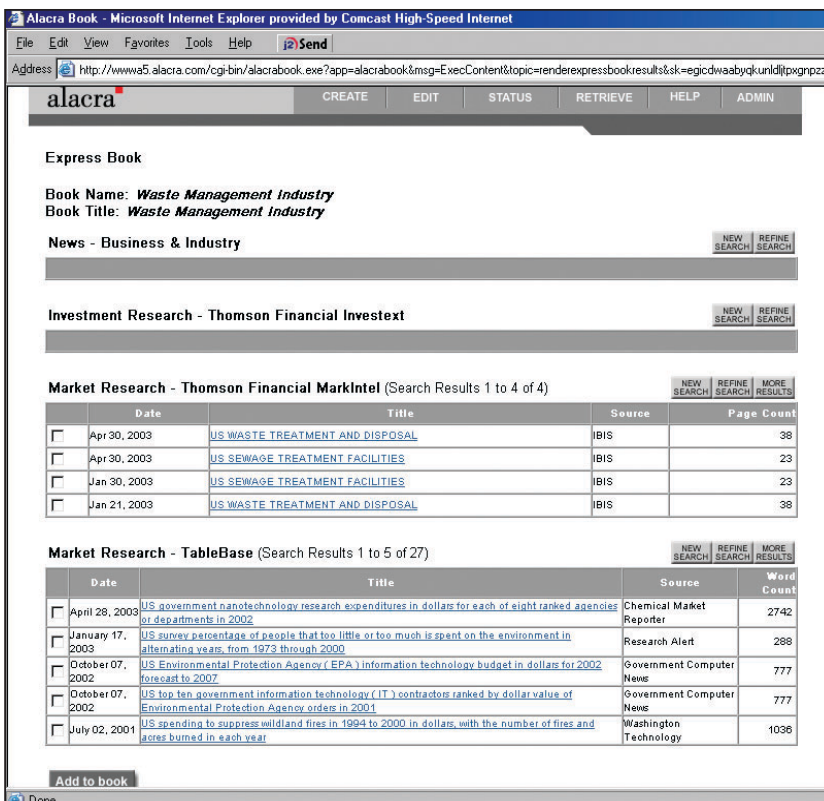
- *Pay-per-view:* An Alacra customer can build an Alacra Book by paying \$25 per book, plus the cost of the content. Depending on what the user needs in their book, this per-book price can range from \$100 to \$500.
- *Subscription:* For Alacra customers who want to use the Alacra Book feature frequently, the price ranges from \$3,000 to over \$20,000 per month, depending on the size of the organization, the number of databases included in the book, and the level of customization supported.

Alacra is about to release a version of Alacra Book that, for a flat fee of \$200 per book, contains a broad range of information from Thomson Financial, including investment research, earnings estimates, shareholding, SEC filings, news, and more. The retail price of the content in this book would be about \$400.

Marydee Ojala (“Driving Alacra,” *ONLINE*, November/December 2001, pp. 72-74) wrote that the Alacra Book “promises to streamline this research process.” Two years later, Alacra has successfully delivered. Since Alacra came onto the scene, it has been able to differentiate itself from the competition by listening to its customers. It now helps customers with applications and delivery platform development, and consults on intranet and portal design. As a database aggregator, the company continues to think outside the box in terms of information retrieval and delivery. They try harder.

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Comments? E-mail Letters to the Editor to marydee@xmission.com.



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Comprehensive Business Information, Packaged and Delivered.



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