1-1-2013

Literati by Credo

Larry Sheret
Marshall University, sheret@marshall.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://mds.marshall.edu/lib_faculty
Part of the Education Commons, and the Library and Information Science Commons

Recommended Citation

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Libraries at Marshall Digital Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Libraries Faculty Research by an authorized administrator of Marshall Digital Scholar. For more information, please contact zhangj@marshall.edu.
Literati by Credo

doi:10.5260/chara.14.3.20

Date of Review: November 26, 2012

Composite Score: ★★★★ 1/2

Reviewed by: Larry Sheret
Marshall University
Drinko Library
One John Marshall Drive
Huntington, WV 25755
<sheret@marshall.edu>

Abstract

Literati by Credo (Academic and Public) is an online product featuring a superb and growing reference database of more than 600 subject encyclopedias and dictionaries, marketing and information literacy tutorials, and assessments. All of this is folded into one seamlessly integrated platform with the value added functionality of XML and completely customizable features (such as are available in LibGuides) as well as API connectors to open search a library’s other holdings. Active customer support and services offer solutions tailored to help libraries achieve their unique mission and programming needs.

Pricing Options

Because of the many options for products and services available, pricing is highly variable, depending upon the size of the institution, ranging from $8,000 to $60,000. Because this is a service (solution) and not simply content, the company feels there is no way to give an accurate overall price and there is also no basic price for the product. It is all individually quoted. Existing subscribers will receive a lower rate when upgrading from Credo General Reference to Credo Literati. Consortial discounts are offered. The state of Louisiana subscribes on behalf of all K-12 schools, public libraries, colleges, and universities. The Credo’s Literati has three integrated components: technology platform with foundational reference content; connectivity with a library’s trusted resources; and customized information and digital literacy services. Due to the consultative services that are a crucial part of Literati, the range of subscriptions could be from $1,000 for a one-off project for an individual institution to $1,000,000 for a country-wide proposal.

Product Description

To understand Credo Literati, it is necessary to understand its individual parts, beginning with the content that Credo provides. Credo Reference was founded in the U.K. in 1999, under the name Xrefer. The database began with about three dozen reference books searchable online for free. Two years later, Xrefer had grown to 50 reference titles containing over 500,000 entries. In 2002, Xreferplus began as the company’s first subscription based service with 100 titles and a customizable interface. The corporation’s name was changed to Credo Reference in June 2007. By 2010, Credo General Reference database had a core offering of 100 titles and Credo General Reference Premium had grown to over 500 titles from more than 70 highly respected publishers.

In 2009, the University of Washington published the results of an information literacy study that stated “Finding contexts for ‘backgrounding’ topics and for figuring out how to traverse complex information landscapes may be the most difficult part of the research process.” In response to this study, Credo developed 10,000 topic pages that put information into a context. Topic pages provide a definition, short overview, word cloud of related concepts, mind map (see Figure 1), article entries from subject encyclopedias, images, and guidance on where to find more in-depth research. New reference e-books are added almost every week at no extra charge. There are now more than 3.6 million entries with over 500,000 images, videos, and audio clips.

Credo expanded the number of user options available on the search page such as social networking and share tools (Twitter, Facebook, etc., and links to information management tools such as Zotero, EndNote, etc.), saved results page, a collection of gadgets, topic pages and related topic pages, a concept map with hot links that connect directly to the Credo database and topic pages, and proper citation formatting for every item in the database. By 2010, Credo General Reference had emerged into its present form. The entire site operates in XML, so it is highly interoperable and automatically displays well on any desktop or mobile device. Multimedia content runs on most end users’ computers and mobile devices.

Credo had been working on other initiatives and offered optional products for libraries to purchase to improve the information gathering experience of students. One of these was a module to enable API connection to a library’s own content and subscription services. This technology allowed Credo Reference to morph into a discovery service. Credo Online Reference Service was becoming more than a traditional online database. A new offering emerged that would include not only content.

Literati by Credo was launched on January 1, 2012, and consists of: a new technology platform with Credo General Reference Premium as the core content; connectivity to library resources; topic pages that provide a comprehensive landing page on which information is presented “in context” and linked to Credo General Reference; discovery layer that enables federated search and connection to library content directly from the Topic Pages or through a simple keyword search; and information and digital literacy services.

Both products, Credo Online Reference Service (aka Credo General Reference Premium) and Literati by Credo (aka Credo Literati), have the same content. Interlinking to the subscribing library’s home resources, “search other sites,” and Topic Page-federated search are
available in both products, but there are many increased customization options with Literati, such as the ability to group resources to educate students, “tooltips” to teach what the databases are, the naming of buckets of information (each bucket contains the top three relevancy ranked results from Credo and other library resources), and several other customization features such as one might find in LibGuides. The ability to customize pages is one of the distinctions between Credo Reference and Literati.

The smallest core collection available in Literati has over 610 titles, with new titles being added almost weekly. Librarians may choose the titles they prefer out of a larger collection of over 1,200 titles. Literati Academic and Literati Public include different titles that are suitable for their respective users. In addition to the core collection, e-books and reference collections from a number of highly respected vendors are available through Literati. For example, a library could purchase Sage Online Reference through Sage or Literati, but the cost would be marginally higher if purchased through Literati due to the special enhancements made to the Sage resource to make it more interactive on the Literati platform. Sage does not offer a subscription to Sage Online Reference, but libraries may obtain a subscription to this collection through Literati. Once again, this Sage resource, as with several reference offerings by other publishers, is fully integrated into Credo to enable all content to run on its platform in XML, and newly added titles are cross-referenced and indexed with the rest of the collection. All collections automatically format to display well on any computer or mobile device, and there are no DRM restrictions. A listing of all publisher reference collections that are offered as add-ons to the core reference collection is available at <http://corp.credoreference.com/products/product-list/publisher-collections.html>.

Another distinction between Credo Reference and Literati is that selected topic pages may be added to the Literati home page to highlight resources that support various classes such as freshman First Year Experience, or to deal with an urgent public health issue, for example. The options are endless. If a topic page is required that doesn’t currently exist in Credo’s list of 10,000 topic pages, Credo Literati will design and create it upon request. Campus news, information literacy tutorials, My Literati (a personal student account in Literati), important library links, the concept map, and other specialized content created by or for a library may be added to the home page.

The Literati platform enables libraries to add their own branding, embed chat widgets, select among several gadget options to display word pronunciations, definitions, book search by classification type, book type or title, person search, quotations, holidays and festivals, locations and images, and a crossword puzzle solver. Gadgets may be accessed in General Reference by clicking a tab, but in Literati, libraries may select gadgets for placement on the splash page as each library determines the look and function that is most desirable. (See Figure 2.)

Connectivity with a library’s other resources is provided via federated search and links from the topic pages. Librarians choose databases to associate with the topic pages by aligning them to one or more of seventeen subject areas. This sets up a process of guided self-discovery where students are taken to the topic page first to receive an introduction to a topic along with background information. Then they are provided with three relevancy ranked articles from each of a pre-selected number of library databases. Researchers are also presented with results from additional library databases that have been aligned with the topic, the library catalog, the Web, YouTube, etc.

Credo has, in effect, created its own discovery layer that provides a scaled back Web scale-like discovery experience. Relying upon federated searching rather than pre-indexing, the look and feel are somewhat akin to VuFind by Villanova University, AquaBrowser by Serial Solutions, Encore by Innovative Interfaces, and Worldcat Local, but, of course, the results are not as precise or exhaustive as Web scale discovery. Those products are also customizable, but they do not provide users with topic pages, nor with the third feature of Literati, information and digital literacy services. Another feature that the Credo platform lacks when comparing its federated search to Web scale discovery is that other library resources listed in the left column of the display are not searched until they are selected. It is impossible to compare, at a glance, how many hits each database contains. Each database in the left column must be selected individually, but the search string is automatically entered and the results display fairly quick-
Ly. Literati has a feature that mitigates this problem. Below each topic page is a grouping of several “information buckets,” or boxes, that contain three relevant results from each of several sources, including selected library databases, the library catalog, Web sites, etc. This gives students a great way to see the wide variety of resources available to them in various formats at a glance. These features make Literati an excellent launching pad for doing research.

The third and perhaps most distinctive feature of Literati is that it offers libraries an extensive range of support and development services that integrate library outreach, multimedia instruction, and assessment along with the rest of its products and services. The librarians and educators at Literati collaborate closely with subscribers to tailor the Literati interface, products, and services to the needs of the institution. Instructional materials are developed based on the institution’s strategic goals and are not limited to Credo products. These include Guide on the Side tutorials built with open source software created by the University of Arizona and accessible at <http://code.library.arizona.edu/gots/about>. An example of a Guide on the Side tutorial is one that Credo developed in collaboration with the University of Tennessee, Martin, which may be viewed at <http://corp.credoreference.com/gots/tutorial/choosing-an-e-book>.

Adobe Captivate is used for the majority of tutorials because it is the most reliable across platforms and operating systems. As multimedia creation software becomes available that is compliant with HTML5, other products may be used to create tutorials, such as Camtasia.

The following links provide examples of multimedia created by Literati in collaboration with subscribing libraries in the areas of information discovery, information literacy instruction, assessment, classroom integration, and library promotion.


The assessment (#3 above) is only one example of the many types that can be provided depending on a library’s needs, or the needs of the curricula that the library is collaboratively supporting.

Literati supports instruction in the classroom. Whether creating subject-specific tutorials or designing scaffolding modules (#4 above), instructional materials may be embedded online in a course management system, shared through e-mail, or used during library sessions. The following tutorial on citing sources, with assessments included, was created for Austin Community College. <https://softchalkcloud.com/lesson/serve/WtAQ0veUg9DyS/html>.

An example of a tutorial that was created for Baylor to support its history and political science classes includes links to specialized topic pages as well as an explanation on how to use the mind map. <http://corp.credoreference.com/images/literati_tutorials/il_tutorials/baylor/baylor_distinguishing_between_historical_isms/baylor_distinguishing_between_historical_isms.htm>.

Literati will create digital posters and public service announcements to create and expand awareness of library resources (<http://corp.credoreference.com/images/PDFs/park.pdf>). Social media campaigns that use Twitter, Facebook, and other sites allow Literati to work with a library to increase its Web presence. Case studies and scholarship data can be used to showcase an institution’s programs and servic-

On October 29, 2012, Credo Reference added Librarian Connect to its Literati solution. Powered by Mosio, Inc. the new service offers texting capabilities along with chat and e-mail. In the future, Literati plans to create a tool that will allow librarians to collaborate more closely and quickly with faculty to utilize multimedia materials and to customize them for specific courses. Reference content will be expanded and additional customization tools will be made available on the Literati platform.

**Critical Evaluation**

The search engine recognizes Boolean operators, phrases, truncation, and wildcards. As a search is being inputted, a drop-down menu offers predictive search terms and phrases. This feature is particularly useful to students who are unfamiliar with their research topic. It provides guidance and saves time and frustration, especially for undergraduates. Unfortunately, combining phrase with truncation or wildcard searching is not supported. A search of “critical* think*” or “critic?? thinking” yields no results. Given the value that Literati holds for the information illiterate, adding these functions to the search engine would be beneficial. (Because EBSCO’s platform supports the combination of phrase and truncation or wildcard searching, EBSCO’s search engine may be better to instruct students on advanced searching techniques). Searches may be filtered by broad subject categories, book title, headings, date, selected formats, and features (articles, biographies, entries with images, audio, maps, video, and results). Search results may be displayed by relevance, date, or length of entry.

When a topic page comes up as a result of the search, additional library resources are shown, some of which display three relevant results with a short abstract. For example, a search of “critical thinking” from Marshall University Libraries displays the topic page and three relevant entries from each of the following: Credo Reference, library databases including Newspaper Source, ASP, ATLA, ebrary, featured media content from Credo, and Wikimedia Commons. Also shown on the topic page results page are a list of Literati gadgets, related topics word cloud, mind map, the library catalog, recommended library databases, library chat, and additional library resource links. Results from commercial vendors such as Google Books could be added to the options presented to students, if so desired. In truth, it is difficult to describe the topic page results screen because it may be customized by a library to display in any number of ways.

Although the topics pages are extremely beneficial, it is unfortunate that many spurious results can be generated by federated searching. This cannot be avoided because, until a student is able to focus a search, Literati will display a very large range of possible sub-topics. This can be an opportune time for an information literacy instructor to discuss how to evaluate information and to introduce techniques to narrow a search. In addition to the false hits, there are plenty of good options to choose from, so it is unlikely that a student’s initial confusion would turn into frustration. This is part of the experience of discovery, and guided self-discovery actually mitigates against frustration and lost time.

Federated searching is clunky. Library and other Web resources may load slowly, depending upon a user’s available bandwidth, but they load beneath the reference results, or the topic page, if one is available. Long before the page is read, everything has loaded. If a student doesn’t wish to read the reference hits list or the topic page, patience will be required for all of the search results to load. Given the close relationship Credo has with other vendors, they might consider (and probably have) pre-indexing databases to create a genuine Web-scale discovery experience. Credo shares its metadata with discovery services, and all of them allow subscribers to treat Literati results preferentially by placing topic pages on the top of their results list.

If one is looking merely for an online reference database, one of Credo’s competitors (who are also partners) could be an option such as Gale Virtual Reference Library, Oxford Reference Online, Springer-Reference.com, Wiley Online Reference Works, Blackwell Reference Online, and others. None of Credo’s competitors/collaborators include topic pages to place information into a context for students.

Credo General Reference, combined with the federated searching module, may suffice to meet a library’s needs. Subscribe to Credo Literati only if your library has a clear mission statement and specific goals that it seeks to achieve in order to best support the educational programs of its institution. Literati collaborates closely with libraries to provide their institutions with best practices and technology to find solutions that meet library and program goals. Because Literati will tailor its products or create news ones, specific to each subscribing library’s needs, the company does not market its products and services as packages with a specific cost. The staff at Literati insists on dialoging with potential clients first to find out what the needs are and to develop solutions that work. This level of involvement with institutional programing is unique.

Literati integrates several features and capabilities into a seamless product that includes an excellent, scalable, online reference collection that is XML-enhanced and layered with a customizable platform, featuring discovery, information literacy and assessment, marketing, and professional support. From a student’s perspective it has the look and feel of a discovery system that includes many of the value added features common to LibGuides. Students who use Literati regularly will pick up good information seeking habits without being aware of it. From a librarian’s perspective Literati provides an integrated solution to support student research with advanced features that might be difficult for some libraries to achieve on their own at a reasonable cost.

The Literati site is designed to support guided discovery. Students enter a search and are introduced to an overview of their topic and with a variety of options from which to proceed with their research. Literati is well suited to be a launching pad for information literacy (IL) instruction. The structure of the site matches the sequence that librarians instruct students to follow when doing research. Just as many librarians anchor IL instruction to LibGuides, a Credo Topic Page could be used in much the same way, pointing the way to additional resources, library contact information and online tutorials.

Many of Literati’s competitors are also collaborators. Literati’s staff works closely with Springshare, which hosts LibGuides. Literati will create LibGuides for libraries, or pages that function like LibGuides. As there is considerable overlap between the products these two companies offer, some libraries might entertain the possibility of eliminating LibGuides. Most, however, will wish to retain the hands-on control over the production of what is posted on LibGuides as well as the ability to modify LibGuides on the fly. At a minimum, librarians should check to ensure that they are not paying extra for duplicate add-ons.

Libraries might find the federated search function offered through Literati to be a better value than alternative products, depending upon the user experience they are seeking to create. Federated searching
is good for known searching. A particular item is easy to find from among the library's many holdings. Federated search within Literati is best for exploratory searching. An institution may wish to have a separate federated search system along with Literati's federated search to serve different user groups, or it may find this to be redundant and an area for potential cost cutting. Literati could be a solution for an institution that already has Web-scale discovery, but wishes to add or retain the value of dynamic federated searching.

Literati claims that it offers cost effective solutions to libraries. The company has shown a genuine commitment to serving the needs of libraries. Most of the video and PowerPoint-like tutorials that Literati produces are available for free on the Web. Credo is the sponsor of Libraries Thriving, a collaborative online space for e-resource innovation and information literacy promotion. The webinars provided by Libraries Thriving are archived and made freely available at librariesthriving.org. I attended a webinar in October entitled From School to Workforce: Information Literacy, Critical Thinking, and Problem-Solving Skills. Guest speakers Jennifer Homer and William Badke were featured in this very instructive webinar.

Contact Information

Credo Reference Ltd.

U.S. Office
201 South Street, 4th Floor
Boston, MA 02111
Phone: (617) 426-5202
Fax: (617) 426-3103
E-mail: <support@credoreference.com>
URL: <www.corp.credoreference.com>

U.K. Office:
Prama House
267 Banbury Road
Oxford OX2 7HT
United Kingdom
Phone: +44 (0)1865 339 450
Fax: +44 (0)1865 339 301
E-mail: <info@credoreference.com>

Contract Provisions

Contracts are flexible and specially crafted for each subscriber. Multi-year subscriptions and consortial pricing are available and cost effective. Louisiana’s LOUIS consortium provides Literati state-wide to all K-12, public, college, and university libraries. South Dakota provides access to public libraries (individualized accounts) and colleges/universities (centralized account). Credo General Reference Premium is subscription only, but all optional titles may be added by purchase or subscription. MARC records are available to load for books chosen for the Credo General Reference collection into the library catalog. COUNTER compliant use statistics are supported.

Authentication

All major types of authentication are supported, including library card number, username/password, authorized IP, referring URL, Athens and Shibboleth and LDAP. Virginia has a state-wide consortial
agreement with Credo that uses GeoLocation, backed up with IP authentication. All titles in the collection are DRM-free.

Author’s References

About the Author
Larry Sheret is the Instruction and Emerging Technologies Librarian/Associate Professor at Marshall University’s Drinko Library in Huntington, West Virginia. He provides library liaison services to the Department of Modern Languages and the School of Physical Therapy, works with faculty to post their scholarly publications in Marshall’s institutional repository, and provides information literacy instruction and assessment. He was the Public Services/Instruction Librarian at Western State University’s Savage Library in Gunnison, Colorado and the Program Coordinator of the Library and Learning Center at Central Arizona College, Aravaipa Campus, in Winkelman, Arizona. He received his M.A. from the School of Information Resources and Library Science at the University of Arizona in 1996.