

Additional limits such as language, record type, or treatment codes have to be set on yet another page.

Added Features

The WebSPIRS thesaurus includes an option to explode search terms. Although it was not activated in my trial subscription, individual users can set up SDIs that will be run each time the database is updated. It is also possible to have the database link to local holdings, and for a modest fee SilverLinker can be activated to link directly to electronic journal holdings.

Advisor Selected References

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Biography

Michelle Wilde received her BA from Oregon State University and her MLS from Indiana University. She is currently the Physical Sciences Librarian at Colorado State University. In addition to her collection development duties, Michelle is also active in the library's instruction program. ■



▼ ADVISOR REVIEWS—STANDARD REVIEW

AP SoundBank

Date of Review: August 18, 2000

Composite Score:

★★★ 3/4

Reviewed by: **Larry R. Sheret**
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Pricing Options

The pricing schedule for AP SoundBank is identical to that of the AP PhotoArchive. Academic subscription costs are determined by the number of simultaneous users and by the size of the user pool. For academic institutions, on the low end, a single user in a pool of less than 5,000 FTE costs \$1,000 a year. On the high end, ten simultaneous users in a pool of over 35,000 FTE runs \$4,500 a year. Although no schedule exists for consortia, negotiated contracts could come out to less than \$400 per user a year.

Single public libraries (with no branches) servicing populations up to 25,000 pay \$500 for a single user, \$700 for five users, \$1000 for ten users, and \$2000 for a site license. Single public libraries serving populations over 25,000 pay \$1,000 for a sin-

gle user, \$1,200 for five simultaneous users, \$2,000 for ten users, and \$5,000 for a site license.

Substantial savings are available for large districts (multibranch public library systems), with subscription pricing breaking out as follows: one to five users—\$1,200 per user; six to fifteen users—\$1,000 per user; sixteen to twenty-four users—\$750 per user; more than twenty-five users—\$500 per user.

Single user licenses for K-12 schools are:

Elementary school	\$400
Middle school	\$500
High school	\$600



AP SoundBank Review Scores Composite: ★★★ 3/4

The maximum number of stars in each category is 5.

Content: ★★★ 1/2

The AP SoundBank is the only extensive source for current and archived audio news clips offered by subscription service over the internet. All clips from the start of the 1990s are currently accessible. Most early sound files not “born digital” are yet to be converted. As retroconversion proceeds, the rating will increase from 3.5 to 4 stars or better. There is currently a dearth of audio clips longer than 60 seconds.

Searchability: ★★★ 1/2

Although Boolean and advanced searching is not possible, several features make this an easy and effective site to search through. These include keyword, date range, fields (speaker, dateline, cut number), audio type (actualities/raw sound, correspondent reports), category (general domestic news, agriculture, entertainment, et.al.), and the choice to display query hits by chronology or relevancy ranking.

Pricing: ★★★★★

Reasonably priced annual subscriptions for higher education institutional subscribers are based on FTE counts. K–12 institutions and public libraries have special pricing schedules. There are no special pricing plans for individuals or low volume users.

Contract Options: ★★★★★

Institutional, site, and district contracts are available. Price is determined by the size of either the user pool or FTE, as well as by the number of simultaneous users. No special reduced cost contract options are available to individual subscribers. Although no consortium pricing formula is currently in place, consortia may negotiate with the vendor using district contracts as a model.

Site licenses for K–12 schools are:

Elementary school	\$500
Middle school	\$1,000
High school	\$2,000

Subscribers to the AP SoundBank may expand the value of the contract by adding the AP PhotoArchive at an additional cost of 30 percent. AP Archive (news text) and AP Graphics (maps, graphs and charts) are not stand alone products, but they may be added to the AP SoundBank or the AP PhotoArchive for an additional charge of 10 percent for each. To subscribe to the entire package of all four databases of sound, photos, text and graphics is only 50 percent above the base price of subscribing to either AP SoundBank or AP PhotoArchive alone. AP Multimedia, which is the name for the combined databases, is ramping up for a launch in early fall, 2000. (*Ed Note: AP PhotoArchive was reviewed by Mr. Sheret in TCA, v.1, no. 4.*)

Product Description

Working in conjunction with AccuWeather, the world’s largest corporate supplier of weather information and images, AP is now making its sound archive available to schools (K–12) and public and academic libraries. AccuWeather’s mission is to supply copyright-cleared sound to subscribers for educational purposes over the internet, using an interface that is easily and intuitively understood by nonnews professionals.

The Associated Press (AP) formed in 1848 when six daily newspapers in New York City collaborated on the installation of a telegraphic relay to transmit foreign news brought by ships docking in the harbor. AP began adding audio content to its news services in the early 1940s. Leased wires delivered sound clips to radio stations throughout the country. Today, AP is providing digitized audio to radio stations via the internet. Along with the resulting efficiencies and cost effectiveness, news professionals now have random access to all current and archived news stories.

AP SoundBank is the archive of audio files containing AP news clips that are at least 72 hours old (breaking news is only available to news outlets through another service called AP Prime-Cuts). Launched three years ago as a technologically superior way to transmit broadcast quality news clips to news outlets worldwide, this same database is now available to libraries.

AP SoundBank is radio in the raw. Most of these monaural audio clips are short, less than 30 seconds long. To gain a sense for what is available on this database, imagine listening to a five-minute news spot on the hour or half-hour. Chances are, half that time will be dedicated to commercials. Of the two and a half minutes given to the news, five to ten news items will be presented. Each news item will be as little as ten seconds in length, but rarely as long as sixty seconds. Taken separately, these news clips amount to little more than sound bites. For the most part, AP SoundBank is a collection of sound bites. There are 500 thou-

sand sound bites, and this number is growing steadily as three-day-old news clips are added, and as the retroconversion of older analog clips proceeds at the rate of three hundred per day.

When accessing audio of Roy Rogers and Dale Evans singing "Happy Trails To You," a clip of about twenty seconds long is all that is available. When searching for the speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., it is not possible to find one entire speech. Rather, one hears the most memorable parts of his speeches—the short sections that aired on radio news.

The AP SoundBank homepage offers several user-friendly options such as an explanation of the site, a user guide, demo, access log, subscription information, and the technical resources required for successful downloads. When logging on, every user must enter a user ID and password, unless entering on an IP-filtered computer or through remote access via a proxy server that grants access only to a secure, trusted URL.

The search page is visually stark, with a black background and white text. Patrons who wish to print out search queries must first select page setup from the Windows file menu and click "black text" to get their pages to print.

Boolean searching is not available. News radio personnel have not considered it necessary to create some of the points of access into the archive that librarians would wish to see. In spite of this, the search page is easy to use. A keyword search will produce results based upon the abstract, header, dateline and other fields. The search engine recognizes word groupings set within parentheses. Date range, category, and file type may also be selected as search parameters. Both the singular and plural forms of all search terms automatically display unless the terms are placed in parentheses. Apart from this, truncated search queries will not yield results.

The search results page is relatively easy to understand (apart from certain proprietary information used by news professionals). Each hit is displayed in a box with four lines of text. The first line is the header, and it gives the name of the person or thing heard on the audio clip. The second line is a very brief abstract of what is on the clip. Line three identifies the clip by category (Flashback, Features, Obituary, Entertainment, etc.), or by subject (e.g., Beatles, Space Shuttle, Phil Keaggy). The fourth line gives information on Cut Number, Outcue, Length, and File Type. This line is mostly of interest to news personnel. To the right of each hit is a column which contains the news clip's dateline and which offers the searcher three options: to preview the audio, to download a high quality MPEG audio file, or to find similar sound files. This reviewer found the Similar option to be a particularly easy, useful, and fun way to expand a search and to increase the level of serendipity in the results. Searchers unsure of what keyword to enter will also find this to be a useful function.

When choosing to download a file, users have the option of opening the file or saving it onto the computer. Files are large, containing approximately 20 kbps of audio. Short clips with file sizes of 250–500KB are commonplace.

Critical Evaluation

Librarians intimately acquainted with the workings and jargon of the publishing industry may find the AP SoundBank to be somewhat unfamiliar territory. AP SoundBank is made available to libraries as a direct outgrowth of the field of news radio. The display of technical information on the search results screen may be confusing to some users. Others will find it an interesting experience to gain access to "the real thing." It takes about ten to fifteen minutes to get comfortable with the site, not because it has design flaws, but because "raw audio" is a format unfamiliar to most library users. Even if they have had experience accessing audio and/or video clips from sites such as MSNBC and Real.com, this database will feel different to them because nothing on the site has been pre-packaged. The strength of this database is that it provides students, educators and researchers an invaluable source for raw news audio.

Searching the AP audio files takes longer than searching text or photographic files, and it is not as precise. Fulltext keyword searching of transcribed audio files is not available because the clips have only been abstracted. And unlike thumbnailed photo archives, which can be visually scanned at a glance, audio files must be opened and heard clip by clip, and this takes time.

AP SoundBank is a unique offering. Although large collections of audio can be tracked down for free on the Web, they usually contain audio that has been edited to be part of a larger presentation, and their breadth of coverage is very limited.

For anyone who wishes to do original research using raw audio sound bites from source material that covers every conceivable topic that has been in the news, AP SoundBank has no peers.

The Recorded Sound Reference Center of the Library of Congress is home to perhaps the largest audio collection available to library patrons (it includes the sound files of ABC News), but it is not available online. NPR's "Lost and Found Sound" archive is a wonderful and interesting source for old audio, but the site only includes sounds aired on NPR beginning in January, 1999. The Stanford Archive of Recorded Sound contains 200,000 recordings, but these are largely uncatalogued and not available online.

The greatest drawback to AP SoundBank is that most of the files predating 1990, especially the oldest clips, are difficult to get. This is due in large part to the enormous effort still required to turn old audio files into digital. One way around this problem is for users to locate old audio that has been re-aired and listed under the category "Flashback." The need to reformat old ana-

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log sound clips is being actively addressed by AP as it retro-converts 300 files each day.

Searching through "Flashback" produces several duplicates of audio clips that air every year for anniversary events and holidays. These duplicate files produce the audio equivalent of a citation index and are indicative of news stories that have persisted through the years.

AccuWeather and AP are attempting to launch AP Multimedia in fall 2000. This site will enable students to perform a single multimedia keyword search and simultaneously obtain hits for several pages of text, dozens or hundreds of photographs, sound clips, and graphics. Multimedia searching from a single site will facilitate the likelihood that students will begin to turn in multimedia research "papers" on CD. Although there are no current plans to include a video database, it is likely that one will be added at some point.

Contract Provisions

Institutions are not allowed to create their own archives using AP's database. Educators may use clips in lesson plans and presentations as long as the organization they work for is a current subscriber to the archive. If a subscription lapses, educators may no longer use the audio clips for classroom presentations. Students who place clips into a "paper" or school project may retain those clips in perpetuity. For those who wish to use audio in multimedia presentations, AP provides a written disclaimer that states the audio clip is the property of AP and is protected by copyright law. Although no specific provision for ILL is written into the contract, permission may be assumed since audio clips may be transmitted by licensed users as attachments to a specified e-mail user. Commercial requests should be addressed to The Associated Press at (212) 621-1930.

Authentication

IP filtering is available for automatic access to the site. Remote access is also available to all users who enter through a proxy server with a secure, trusted URL. If access is attempted from an unrecognized IP address, an alternative homepage window loads, which prompts the user for name and password.

Equipment Requirements

Any computer platform will suffice as long as it is equipped with a Windows or Mac compatible sound card, and able to process MPEG files and run RealPlayer audio software.

AP SoundBank recommends Netscape and RealPlayer (or their own AP MPEG Player) because there are no known glitches. However, "if" someone should wish to use a Unix, Linux or some other OS, this should work, as long as an MPEG player is installed to run the audio clips, and as long as the MPEG player is compliant with Java1.1. It has been the experience of the staff at AP SoundBank that anything other than using Netscape with RealPlayer (or AP MPEG) could create problems. They are currently working with Microsoft to resolve problems associated with running RealPlayer on Internet Explorer. Anyone running IE will probably want to use Windows Media Player since it runs better on IE than any other player.

The minimum recommended requirements are 133 MHz CPU, 32 MB RAM, 100 MB available hard drive space, 28.8 bps modem, Netscape Navigator 3.0 or Internet Explorer 4.0. Proprietary browsers such as AOL's will not work at this time. Local ISPs or mainstream communications carriers such as AT&T are recommended since they provide substantially faster download speeds when compared to proprietary ISPs such as AOL and CompuServe. Netscape is the browser of choice since it is fully compliant with Java 1.1, which is required to run clips on Real Player. Problems with Internet Explorer are expected to be resolved shortly. Windows Media Player, which runs on Internet Explorer, provides trouble-free operation. Or, subscribers may choose to obtain free downloads of AP MPEG player (in lieu of Real Player), and AP SoundDesk, which converts MPEG downloads into .wav files for editing.

Author Selected References

"Medialink Adds Internet Distribution to Media via Associated Press." <http://www.medialinknewsnow.com/991109.htm>.

Selected Users

All current subscribers are professional news outlets. The database has yet to be made available to libraries at the time of this review. Estimated product launch is slated for fall 2000.

Biography

Larry Sheret is the Program Coordinator of the Learning Resource Center at Central Arizona College, Aravaipa Campus. He serves on Central Arizona College's Learning Outcomes and Web Development committees. Mr. Sheret earned his MA from the University of Arizona School of Information Resources and Library Science in 1996. ■