

Britannica Online Offers Noteworthy Features to Consider for Annual Renewal

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By James Speed Hensinger

To buy or not to buy. That is the question staff at libraries and schools are having to answer for themselves as their BCR subscriptions to the Web-based Encyclopædia Britannica Online come up for renewal May 31. Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc. astounded everyone last year by launching britannica.com, a second Web-based encyclopedia, but with free access for anyone to use.

For some institutions, the choice may seem obvious. An information resource available at no charge to students and patrons is a gift during these times of tight budgets. But library and school staff should be aware that Britannica Online has a number of features not available to users of britannica.com, features that may better meet the needs of both staff and patrons. Britannica is developing Britannica Online into a portal, building links to numerous other quality sites on the World Wide Web. New features include Encyclopedia Britannica Intermediate Version (EBI), Spotlights, BritannicaSchool and BritannicaU.

Encyclopedia Britannica Intermediate Version (EBI)

Linked from the home page, EBI complements the information from Encyclopædia Britannica itself. EBI should prove to be of value to elementary schools, middle schools and public libraries. Community colleges and universities offering degrees in education may also find it a useful resource for new teachers. Some of its features include:

- Easy-to-understand articles written for students in grades 5 and higher.
- Easy-to-use "Not sure of your spelling?" feature for spell-checking.
- Thumbnail images in articles that link to full-size photos and maps with captions or descriptions. Copyright information is also included.

Spotlights

Spotlights are special editorial features that provide in-depth, multimedia tours through selected topics. Current Spotlights include: Thunderstorms and Tornadoes that showcases storm creations and their paths; Discovering Dinosaurs, a thoughtful exploration of the major themes of dinosaur study, illustrated with animations and historical photos; and Normandy: 1944, a multimedia exposition of D-Day and the Allied invasion of Normandy during World War II. Previous Spotlight features are available in a Spotlight Archive.

BritannicaSchool

BritannicaSchool is being designed specifically for students and teachers in grades 5 and up. Materials are age appropriate, and online resources are available for research, study and teaching. In addition to access to the complete Encyclopædia Britannica and Merriam-Webster's Dictionary and Thesaurus, resources include:

- More than 250 state-curriculum aligned Study Guides. These are interactive curriculum-based modules targeted at grades 9-12. They align with state curriculum standards and are organized by grade level and topic. Both students and teachers can use these modular Study Guides to enhance and supplement in-class instruction.
- Annotated Web Directory with more than 50,000 education-related sites hand-selected by Britannica's editors.
- Up-to-date World News and Archives with educational activities and teacher notes.
- Britannica Image and Map Bank with more than 6,000 images.

- Research Assistance with guides, templates, advice and wizards.
- Performance Support Templates that help students with reports and teachers with lesson plans.
- Enhanced Britannica Spotlights with educational activities and teacher notes.

BritannicaU

BritannicaU is an Internet-based tool for conducting research, preparing lectures and creating knowledge online. It is designed for academics, students and researchers with resources drawing on the expertise of leading scholars. Rather than scour through hundreds of sites, users can search for, annotate and archive full-text scholarly journals, multimedia reference materials and subject-related Web sites. BritannicaU also provides users with a forum to connect with leading scholars and academic peers through moderated discussion and online academic events. Britannica is seeking academics and students to beta test this feature.

BCR's group subscription to Britannica Online is available to libraries and schools for \$.345 per FTE. To subscribe, go the BCR's Web site (www.bcr.org), click on **Reference Databases** and then on **Britannica** and complete the online form. For more information, contact BCR's Jim Hensinger (jhensing@bcr.org). To try out Britannica Online and evaluate the above new features, sign up for a 30-day trial at www.eb.com.

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