NEWS

Surface Finishing CD

Metal Finishing & Surface Treatment CD–ROM Abstracts Database
MFIS Ltd, PO Box 70, Stevenage, Herts SG1 4DF, Tel (0483) 745115, Fax (0483) 364536 and TWI, Abington Hall, Abington, Cambridge CB1 6AL, Tel (0223) 89162, Fax (0223) 892588. £499 or $850 (including updates for 1 year) (£299 for academics).

CD-ROM has become increasingly popular as a medium for storing and retrieving information, as over 600 Mb of information can be stored on a single CD-ROM disk. This and its convenience of use, has resulted in CD-ROM disks being adapted for database publication and distribution. Best of all in using a database stored on a CD-ROM disk is that you don't need to worry about online time and you can conduct a search while you are doing something else on your computer. The development of network software, such as Windows for Workgroups, has made it possible for several computers to share one CD-ROM driver and this means one database disk can be accessed by many people with networked computers in a group or in a department.

Surface Finishing CD is the first metal finishing and surface treatment database and is supplied on a single CD-ROM disk. The database provides over 30 000 abstracts of papers from all the mainstream metal finishing and electrochemistry journals from 1960 through to the end of 1992 and covering: surfacing, colouring, thermal spraying, plating, hardfacing, coating properties (corrosion, ductility, solderability etc.), printed circuit boards, etching, conversion coatings and anodizing. Typically each abstract contains about 50 words, although some are up to 10 lines long.

I found the disk very easy to install and use. The setup program created a 'Surface Finish' Program Manager Group containing an icon under Windows. To use the database, you insert the disk into a CD-ROM drive and double click the icon with a mouse; software called IdeaList then runs, offering all the facilities you expect from online or conventional databases. The DOS version of the software is also available and offers the same functionality.

Searches can be conducted by using any word contained in the database. This is a very good feature of the IdeaList software which incorporates an index of every word and number in the database. To search with a keyword, you can use a wild card (*) to replace any part of your keyword and you can combine several keywords together with AND, OR, NOT functions; Field searching, Phrase searching, Proximity searching and Range searching can also be used. I found it most useful that keywords can be acquired by scrolling through an available list containing all keywords (terms) in the database, or by typing in a few characters of your desired keyword and the list window will show up available keywords while you are typing. This facility not only provides a convenient and efficient way to put in the right keywords for a search, but also prevents a search achieving zero hits, due to a wrongly formatted or ill defined keyword. Another useful facility is sound-alike searching. Textual terms that are lexically similar to (or sound like) each other can be searched for by enclosing the term in quotation marks. For example, suppose you want to search for a surname, but are not sure of the exact spelling, a sound-alike search for Smith might also find Smythe and Smithson.

The outcome of a search can always be modified to achieve the best result. You can 'Widen' the hitting list if it looks too restricted, or you can 'Narrow' the generated records if you find the search list is too large and not specific enough, or you can 'Exclude' some records.

The search results are well presented in three formats. Fields such as Authors, Title, Source, Year, Volume, Page, Keywords and Abstract are located in a block and are easily distinguished from each other. Keywords used for the search are highlighted. The records of a search result can be printed, one per page, in a way that is visually similar to the appearance of records on the screen. If you need to produce labels, small reports and the like, you can select the print format option to edit the printing format to your requirements. In many cases, a user would like to export a search result to an application. This can be done easily. The IdeaList software allows you to create your own format of the exported text file to suit your application, for example importing into a word processing package. I have tried to import some records from the database into a paper written with Word for Windows 6.0. The imported literature list needs only a few formatting actions (font changing and indent changing) to become the right format for publication in journals.

For many of the records in the database, a copy of the full text of the paper is available at a modest charge from the CD suppliers, for those without easy access to a library which stocks the particular journal. As part of the CD-ROM purchase price, a subscriber will receive quarterly updates on floppy disk for one year; the publishers say they will update the CD-ROM disk itself as the volume of data and sales merit.

Finally, I would strongly recommend those who are interested in surface finishing and surface treatment to obtain a copy of the disk, since it will save

considerable time for those without access to other forms of online literature search facilities. However, the high price of the CD-ROM is geared towards medium and large sized enterprises and may well deter small companies from purchasing an otherwise excellent product, from which they could benefit greatly.

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