

Copyright Clearance Center Acquires Search Startup

Insights



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Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) has announced the acquisition of Pubget, a services and solutions provider focused on accelerating access and use of content in the life sciences. The move illustrates the value that can be created through workflow tools that enhance researcher efficiency, while raising the wider question of who will capture this value.

Important details: [Pubget](#) (see *Insights*, 21 August 2009, [Pubget: Credentialised, Integrated Search for Life Sciences](#)) was launched in 2008, and [acquired](#) by [CCC](#) on 9 January 2012. The business was founded by Ramy Arnaout, a Harvard MD with a DPhil in mathematical biology, who was frustrated by existing search workflows. Initially angel-funded, the founding team included Ian Connor (ex Lotus-IBM) and CEO Ryan Jones (ex FAST Search and Microsoft), both of whom will remain with Pubget post-acquisition.

Pubget offers a combination of search technology and full-text delivery in a rights-compliant environment. It focuses strongly on the fastest access to the PDF – its search results are not bibliographic details with links to the full text but the PDFs themselves. It claims researchers can get access to the PDF in significantly fewer clicks than if they used PubMed or Google Scholar. However, for users that still prefer to search in PubMed, Pubget has created a widget (PaperPlane) that allows one-click access to the PDF from PubMed. Naturally there is an iPad app available for mobile access.

While Pubget can be used by individuals, its real value comes from linking to the institution's holdings, so that the researcher gets immediate access to content licensed by their institution (Pubget essentially acting as an article-level link resolver), while the library gets access to the usage statistics.

Around this core search functionality, services include:

- PaperStore: a document delivery service partnered with [Reprints Desk](#);
- PaperStream: enterprise and individual search and retrieval tools to manage research papers and documents;
- PaperStats: tools to help libraries analyse their spending on content, and to help them compare the cost of subscriptions or bundles to docdel alternatives;
- Text-mining: rights-compliant text-mining solutions;
- Pubget advanced services: an API which allows users to search, post or view papers from their own website;
- Custom search capabilities;
- Consulting services.

The business model originally focused on advertising. As a search engine it is able to offer extremely precise targeting in a similar way to Google. Its ability to break down papers into their constituent parts also allows it to target advertising against specific areas of content, such as placing materials and equipment ads alongside Methods sections. Pubget later added document delivery, permissions management and other enterprise services. It has had a partnership since 2010 with CCC for permissions management.

Implications: Outsell sees a good case for synergy in the acquisition by CCC with potential gains for all stakeholders. Pubget's search technologies will clearly provide a significant enhancement to CCC's capabilities in this area, while CCC brings strong networks and relationships with rightsholders. CCC's Get It Now service is currently focused on academia (as an inter-library loan alternative) while Pubget has been developing presence in corporate delivery.

Pubget is clearly meeting a well-identified user need: according to the company, it served more than five million researchers and 500 research centres in 2011, and claims to handle more than 6.5 million searches a month. This is all about streamlining researcher workflow: searching for and acquiring articles represents a significant fraction of the researcher's time, and it's no surprise that tools that save time here will be welcomed.

Pubget has some direct competitors in the area of enhanced life science searching, including [GoPubMed](#) and [BibliMed](#). These have their particular strengths – for instance, semantic and MeSH-based features respectively – but neither has the document delivery or other tools and services.

Other startups in closely-related spaces include [Mendeley](#), [Papers](#) and [ReadCube](#). Mendeley has a much more strongly social model with sharing papers at its heart, while Pubget's approach to sharing is more explicitly permissions based. Papers and ReadCube both offer search tools but Papers' business model is quite different (software sales) while ReadCube's business model is not yet well developed.

The document delivery market may be flat but remains a core service for both academic and corporate researchers. Speed is everything: for example it is estimated that over 50% of documents supplied through inter-library loan are not used because the researcher no longer needs them by the time they arrive. Key players include [Infotrieve](#) and Reprints Desk, plus a host of other smaller suppliers including libraries, not least the [British Library](#) (see *Insights*, 23 October 2009, [Infotrieve Takes Over CISTI's Document Delivery](#).)

There are also other business models being explored in this area, notably the rental model pioneered by [DeepDyve](#). There is nothing in the CCC/Pubget model, however, that would preclude it from embracing this delivery approach if the market demand is proven.

CCC will need to proceed cautiously with the development of the search advertising model, given its dependence on its relationships with publishers who have long grumbled about Google deriving advertising based on its aggregated content. We understand CCC intends to enter negotiations with rightsholders in this area, with potential revenue sharing options not ruled out.

In the bigger picture, Pubget is another example of the disintermediation of publisher search and discovery. Unlike say Google Scholar, Pubget takes the researcher directly to the PDF, bypassing related services the publisher may have created around the abstract or fulltext HTML views. If Pubget's search efficiencies offer the potential to drive up core content usage, publishers will benefit from the perceived value in the subscription, but may wonder how they will position themselves further upstream in the researcher's workflow under this model.

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