A Layman's Comparison

William Raventos

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Author(s)   William Raventos

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Abstract   Review of *GospeLink* (1998), by Deseret Book; and *Collector's Library '98* (1998), by Infobases.

GospeLink. **Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1998. $49.95.**

Collector's Library '98. **Salt Lake City: Infobases, 1998. $39.95.**

Reviewed by William Raventos

A Layman's Comparison

This is a cursory comparison, not intended to be complete, and my personal preferences are reflected. We all seek the best, most useful product for our own needs. Rarely will one product in a competitive marketplace offer all the best choices: the best look and feel and the most versatility. It appears in this case that such a rule holds true.

It is not intended that this comparison be used for anything other than personal interest. The potential purchaser of either of these products should use his or her own judgment. At most, this comparison should be used as a starting point to explore both products, confirming (or refuting) the observations and conclusions drawn here.

That stated, I have considerable experience with software of all types and tend to look at things from the "power user" point of view. Casual users may have different opinions, but anyone who is serious about employing either of these tools for study, background material in talks, or general "exploring" of texts will want a product that makes navigation and data retrieval easy and is pleasant to use. A product that can, through its look and feel, actually make a contribution to the study process is very desirable.

I installed both of these products on two computers, neither of which is a state-of-the-art "screamer" by any stretch. One is a clone PC, Pentium 166 MHz with 32MB of RAM and a good video card. The other is a Dell notebook, Pentium 133 MHz, with 32MB of RAM.[1]

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[1]   GospeLink is not currently available for the Macintosh; Infobases is.

The Infobases products have been in the marketplace for several years, whereas the Deseret Book product is "first edition new."[2] This would imply that Infobases has had several years to learn and improve while Deseret Book is making its first offering. Of course, it might also be said that Deseret Book has the advantage of being able to look at the evolution of Infobases products and benefit from its competitor's learning curve. In any event, it is impossible to look at one product without making comparisons to the other, and that is the intent of this review.

Installation

I found installing Infobases *Collector's Library* (IBCL) easier and shorter than Deseret Book's *GospeLink*™ (DBGL). Deseret Book has a very nice install utility, but there are yet a few kinks to work out. For example, when installing the "bonus quotes" section of DBGL, you are given the chance to specify a location, but the install wizard ignores that and uses its own specifications.

I installed both IBCL and DBGL on my second hard drive because of available space restrictions. IBCL had no problem. The DBGL program, as stated, was uncertain what to do with the bonus title install. As a result, I had to move the six files in the bonus install manually to the same drive and folder as the main install. Doing so overwrites the INSTALL.LOG in the main directory and has the potential of causing other problems down the road. The only other option might be to edit the Registry so DBGL will know where to look for the bonus quotes application. However, the LDS Quotation Library application is worth the effort of overcoming that glitch.

Bottom line: IBCL is easier to install and takes less than half the time it takes to install DBGL. However, DBGL's install utility is a little more versatile and friendly.

Size (Disk Space Taken)

There is no contest here. IBCL takes up considerably less space. While both products end up putting some additional files in

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2   Although Deseret Book did have an earlier product, *Book of Mormon Reference Library.*

the Windows directories (from 5 to 10MB), DBGL in its most "frugal" installation mode added around 100MB on one computer, while only around 80MB on the other. I am unable at this time to explain why it took so much more space on one computer than the other. Compare this to the about 47MB for IBCL on both machines. DBGL does install the scriptures on your hard drive, however, which makes it possible for you to study and search the scriptures alone without the CD.

You could argue that hard drive space is cheap these days, and you would be right. But this is a product focused at the "average user," one would hope, and an extra 100MB might be hard to come by.

Many large applications (word processors, spreadsheet programs, even games) offer the option of minimum installations on the hard drive, and data access from the CD at the sacrifice of a little speed. This is an option both of these companies might want to consider, especially DBGL.

Bottom line: DBGL is the bigger space hog.

Content

It is not the intent of this comparison to look in detail at the content of either package. Suffice it to say that they both offer some things unique to the individual applications. I personally think it is "pure marketing" to compare the number of titles available in each. This can lead to "how-you-count" kinds of games. And it also can lead to the inclusion of various things that are there for no reason other than to help inflate the title count.

Both products have much of what you would expect as basic, and both products have a lot to offer in the titles that are unique to each. As would be expected, Deseret Book has some exclusive titles, and Infobases has some titles exclusive to Bookcraft. Of course, almost all the public domain sources are included in both. Wouldn't it be great to have one engine that would read both in a user-friendly way?

Bottom line: Both DBGL and IBCL have very impressive lists of almost all the public domain titles in common. Each has several unique titles.[3]

Look and Feel

From my way of looking at it, the DB product comes out a little better here. The graphic look is cleaner and not as visually dark as the IB product. In later releases of IBCL it is possible to remove the background "textures" from the screen (before that happened I would not even have run it). Also, the later releases of IBCL allow much better viewing by selecting predefined window sizes that either remove or deemphasize some of the less important windows so you can actually *read* text. I think that represents an effort on IB's part to meet some customer requests (demands?).

DB has gone one better by not only offering some predefined window and viewing templates, but also giving you the option to resize the windows to suit particular needs. Very nice. And, as I said, the look and feel is not as "dark" as the IB product, which makes for a friendlier feel.

Graphics

While both packages would prefer you to use 16- or 32-bit color (high color or "true" color), DB's product almost requires it. The IB product in 256 colors is just fine. However, when viewing DBGL with 256 colors, you can even miss some buttons and other controls; they seem to come and go depending on where your mouse is or what you are doing. My Dell notebook (Latitude LM) is only a year old, but it does not allow more than

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3   Recently, the church negotiated a purchase of Bookcraft (and consequently Infobases), so now all of the resources and products of both Bookcraft and Deseret Book will be coordinated and administered by the same group. That could be a very positive move, if done properly and with care, and it will be interesting to see how things work out. Sources have told me that the GospeLink and Infobases products will somehow be "joined," and there will in the future be a single, consolidated product. When this will happen, how it will happen, and what the new product will look like is anyone's guess. I'm sure we will all await the new product with anticipation and curiosity.

256 colors when in 600 x 800 resolution, so I am stuck with poor graphics with DBGL.

Bottom line: The DB product has lighter, friendlier graphics and is easier to look at, but penalizes you if you are using 256 colors (they do not mislead you on the colors though; they tell you that 16-bit color is needed).

Speed

No contest here. Though speed is relative and a faster Pentium with more RAM might make both products run quicker, DBGL is definitely at a bit of a disadvantage in the speed department. It is slower (application opening time, going from screen to screen, searching, and so forth). Even with my fastest machine (admittedly not a speedy one by today's standards), the DB product drags along at screen change and search speeds slow enough to be a little frustrating.

One would think that the relative speeds of the two products ought to be closer. They both use the same Folio engine. And one might even argue that the DB product should be faster, since it puts more "stuff" on your hard drive. But that is clearly not the case.

I thought I might be doing something wrong, so I called DB's technical support. When I explained that DBGL was quite a bit slower, the young man I spoke with acknowledged that to be the case.

As an example, DB takes 56 seconds to open the main screen fully from clicking on the start icon and 17 seconds to complete a simple search on 3 words (fiends, infernal, pit). IB takes 12 seconds to open fully and 3 seconds to do an advanced search on the same words.

Bottom line: IB's product is much faster, especially at moderate computer processor speeds. *Note: DB's technical support people assured me that improving the basic speed of the product is one of their top priorities.*

GUI (Graphical User Interface)

This category can spill over into "look and feel," but my take on GUI is that it is more feel than look, while look and feel is, well,

more look than feel. In the GUI department DB is the winner for
me. The layout of the screen is more functional and intuitive, and
the choices at any given point in the program are more obvious.
For a first-time user, I think the DB product would be easier to
learn and offer more flexibility. For the experienced user it is still
a little easier to navigate. That is a big plus.

 Bottom line: Graphical user interface on the DBGL is better.

Searching

For many people, searching will be the heart of their use of
either program. In general, IBCL wins.

IB offers two search levels, simple and advanced. Both levels
are effected within the IBCL program. DB offers only one level of
search within its program. The IB simple search is just that:
simple. But the advanced level is quite powerful and still very easy
to use. DB's single search function is considerably more powerful
than IB's simple search but has glaring omissions when compared
to IB's advanced search.

DBGL has an advanced search function (available from a
right-click pop-up menu), but this function jumps to a Folio win-
dow and is not at all simple to use (you need to learn at least a few
search terms), is not as versatile for defining the search area (you
cannot use search sets), and is not intuitive. It is, however, fast.

Both products offer their versions of search sets, and they both
work quite well. I think DB's predefined search sets are better (or
at least there are more of them). DB's search set manager is easier
to use. The one major weakness in DB's search sets is that you
cannot include (or exclude) the various parts of the scriptures in
your search sets. It seems odd that you cannot select, for example,
just the New Testament for a custom search set. Their technical
support people tell me that they are working to include this in a
future update.

But DB's simple search (the one that most people will use) has
two main disadvantages. The searching is slower. But more
important, the simple search (again, what most are going to use)
leaves out one important element (I called DB's technical support
people in the hopes that I had somehow missed this element, but I
had not). It is this: When defining a search by entering words,

DBGL does not let you see the number of "hits." That is a big negative, and since both products are using essentially the same Folio engine, this lack of "hits information" has to be an omission on DB's part.

What I mean by not showing you the hits is this: Say you want to find the original quotation in Parley P. Pratt's biography where he recounts Joseph's experience in the jail at Richmond, Missouri, when he rebukes the guards and calls them "fiends of the infernal pit." With both products, I select a search of the entire database and type in "fiends. "The IBCL product then informs me that I have 143 hits, or, there are 143 references where "fiends" appears. Then, following "fiends," I will type in "infernal." Again, IBCL tells me I now have 30 hits. In other words, the combination of "fiends" and "infernal" occurring within a few words of each other appears in the entire database only 30 times. With the IB product I can tell that I am narrowing the search. With the DB product, which is not showing me hits as I type, I have no idea whether or by how much I am narrowing the search. Finally, I will type in "pit." IBCL now tells me I have only 25 hits. I will execute the search by clicking on the "Search" button, and the first instance of this hit is shown on-screen almost as soon as my finger comes off the mouse button. Executing the search on DBGL just starts the search. I now have to wait (and watch a little window pop up that says "searching") for a lengthy search to be made before the actual text window comes up with the first hit. It is only then that I see how many hits occurred and which hit I am viewing. While the DB product does show me a window with a line listing of the hits, I have to wait a long time to see it, and I do not enjoy the advantage of having the statistics available to narrow my search. To anyone who uses the search tools, this is a large disadvantage.

IB also offers one more "qualifying field," but in practice being able to enter words that must *not* be in the search is not a feature that I often use.

One thing I wish IB would do is allow you to conduct a search, find your results, then go back to the search window and pick up where you left off. You cannot do this with IB. With DB's advanced search (again, they toggle over to Folio for this), you have a hit counter and the ability to recall easily what your last several

searches were, but the search itself is harder to use and not as versatile in that you cannot apply a search set (as you can in IB). DB's simple search also allows you to recall the parameters of several of the most recent searches—a very powerful tool.

One search feature that is not very well documented in DBGL can help speed up and refine searching. Using DB's very speedy "advanced search" (this is the Folio search, not integrated into the actual DBGL searching), you cannot use search sets but you can narrow down your searching in a different way. After selecting which window you want to search (e.g., scriptures, General Authorities, other LDS authors), maximize the size of that window. This process opens up a "tree" window that allows you to see a complete list of authors and titles for that section. By clicking on various authors or titles and then selecting "checked branches" in the advanced search, you can apply a search—with hit counter—to only those authors and titles you have selected. That is not as good as a predefined or user-defined search set, but it is something!

Bottom line: IB has an advanced search function as a part of their application (DB has only one level of search as part of theirs). IB's easy-to-use advanced search provides a hit counter and is very powerful. Going to DB's advanced search takes you to Folio; the Folio advanced search is very fast and has a hit counter, but is not as versatile and is somewhat less user-friendly. DB's simple search, though slow, allows you to recall your several most recent sets of search parameters and offers search selections that make it powerful.

Two Windows On-Screen, Different Items in Each

If you want to put up two different things at the same time on your screen, DBGL wins the prize. IBCL has some of this function available, but DBGL really makes creative use of it. With DBGL you can put either the KJV or the JST up in one window, and any other book or study material in the second window. That is a very powerful study tool. You can read any book and have the scriptures up alongside at the same time. Moreover, you can click anywhere in the scriptures you are reading and see cross-references to

those scriptures in another window (both products do this, but I think the DB product does it better).

One powerful tool the DBGL provides is the ability to put the KJV on one side of the screen and the JST on the other and then "synchronize" them so that as you scroll in the one version, the other moves with it. You can do some interesting studying and comparing in that way. Very impressive.

Bottom line: For comparative viewing, especially between the KJV and the JST, DBGL is the choice.

Composing with a Word Processor

Each product has its own set of advantages in this area. Each product allows you to manipulate selected text. But with IBCL you can choose which word processor you prefer (and it must be installed as a separate application on your PC) and have that automatically open when you want to bring text over for printing or writing. With DBGL you can select text and bring it to your own word processor, but not automatically. However, DBGL has a fairly useful word processor ("composer") built in, so if you do not have a favorite word processor you do not have to leave the program to write your talk or print your text. DBGL also provides a "preprint" function that allows you to gather all your selected sections and quotations in one place and then easily rearrange the order and content before sending them to the print program or to your own personal word processor.

Bottom line: Both products offer good ways to write and print. DB's function is easy and versatile; IB's has more flexibility with regard to external word-processing applications.

Features

In three feature areas, I think DBGL clearly offers the better choice.

1. DBGL offers twelve "highlighters," IBCL offers six. With the ability to highlight text (much like light underlining or highlighting text in your scriptures or other books), you can create more categories of highlighted text in the standard package with DB's product. For those who highlight, this could have been a big advantage with DB, but apparently the designers did not complete

the function very well. DBGL does not allow you to name the highlighters. If you want to try to remember what 12 colors each mean in your highlighting system, have at it. The simple ability to rename a highlighter from "yellow" to Basics, My Favorites, or Repentance would complete this feature and make it a real advantage. (DB says that will be one of the first things provided in an update.)

2. DBGL's Explorer is marvelous. As a study tool, or just for light reading on a subject, the GL Explorer allows you to cover a lot of ground very efficiently and quickly. It is a great tool.

3. DBGL's "Virtual Encyclopedia" is another powerful tool, with a broader view (pulling more reference material into play) than IB's presentation of the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism.* The Virtual Encyclopedia helps you learn about one subject or topic very quickly.

Bottom line: DBGL probably gives you more state-of-the-art tools for looking up topics and learning about them, and for marking down and saving areas of interest (with the exception of not being able to name the highlighters yet).

Storage Media

IBCL comes on four CDs, DBGL on three. Discounting the one install and utility disk for both products, you end up with three CDs on IB's product and two CDs on DB's product. IBCL has a lot more media-related material such as pictures, graphics, maps, music, and so forth. They take a separate CD just for that. DBGL, while not concentrating on the media-related items, offers a much smoother means of transitioning between the CDs since you need to change them. All the General Authorities and LDS authors are on one CD, while the LDS periodicals and all the "classics" are on the other. IBCL's scriptures and LDS topics are on one CD, the media-related items on the second, and the classics on the third. (With IBCL, you do not have to install the indexes for the classics and graphic items if you do not want to. DBGL gives you no choice.)

Bottom line: If you are going to be dipping into classics and other nonspecific LDS matter, you can navigate between disks

more easily with the DB product. The IB product has more pictures, maps, and music.

Special Features

One special feature in the DBGL, which is treated as a bonus (registering the product activates the feature), is the LDS Quotation Library. This stand-alone application is very useful if you want to see what General Authorities and others have said on a variety of subjects. These are preexcerpted quotations arranged for topical access by people you would probably feel quite comfortable referring to in a church talk or a report. It is a very nice little product all by itself.

Bottom line: Both products have some nice extra features, but this one in DBGL stands out as exceptional.

Features Needed or Missing

The "old" IBCL '97 gave the user the power of creating pop-up links and hyperlinks from one place in the scriptures to another. This was a very powerful feature, which neither IBCL nor DBGL has. I am told that IBCL tried to put that feature in, but there were reliability problems between it and the new Folio engine. I was also told that they think this is an important feature and are aiming to restore it. I do not know what DB is planning to do. Either package would be more powerful if this were included.

Bottom line: Here is an area where some very visible improvement could be made.

Palm Pilot Users

If you are a Palm Pilot user, take note that the IBCL product does a much better job. IB gives you a separate, dedicated reader application that runs on your Pilot. You can install from a fairly large library of preformatted books (all the scriptures are included, plus many books), and the Pilot reader application allows you to navigate and search the material you have installed very easily and intuitively. DBGL includes AportisDoc as a very nice reader application for the Pilot, but bringing over text from DBGL

is not as easy as with IBCL; also, AportisDoc does not let you navigate nearly as easily as with the IBCL reader.

Bottom line: If you use a Palm Pilot, the package that IBCL supplies is so much better as to make comparison meaningless.

Conflicts with Other Software

As I write this (January 1999) DGBL still has one minor conflict with WordPerfect. Installing DBGL puts a file (MFC32.dll) in your Windows system directory that is a newer version than the one WordPerfect (version 8) expects to see. The DBGL install overwrites any previous version that was there. The newer file installed by DBGL effectively disables the template function in WordPerfect, as well as causing a few minor problems with the Corel desktop application manager (DAD).

DBGL has a yet-newer version of MFC32.dll—which they make available to any interested user (and may by now be shipping on the product CDs)—that corrects the problem with WordPerfect templates. As of this moment, however, there is still the DAD conflict, but it is the only one I know of. I am sure DB will have this fixed before long.

Personal Conclusions

There will be champions for both products. Notwithstanding the large amount of disk space required, I will run both products on my machines for now.

If I had to choose only one product, the choice would be very difficult. I vacillate back and forth, depending on what I am doing at the moment. I think I like much of DBGL better, but the price you have to pay in lack of speed and in much less efficient searching is a big one. If DB can figure out how to make their application run faster (IB made large improvements in their second release, and DB could follow suit) and put a hits counter in their basic search function, then I think the nod would go to DBGL.

Watching both of these products as they put out their next versions will be very enlightening. In the meantime, I will continue to play with both.