1991

Full Page Ads

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Publishers and librarians share many concerns, not the least of which is learning as much as possible about the creators and users of information — who they are and what they want. Recently, Elsevier Science Publishers hired a research firm to survey scientific authors around the world for their views on scientific communications. Scientists were asked about their preferred media for communication, what they look for in a journal and how they use various media. We'd like to share some of the findings with our library colleagues in this, the sixth feature in our ongoing series, Information on Information.

**SURVEY RESPONDENTS**

The average respondent to the survey (more than 550 scientific authors worldwide) is 39 years old, has 43 publications to his/her name and has completed his/her education in the mid-1970s. She or he works in a university (56%), an independent institute (19%), a medical institute (8%) or in industry (12%). And he or she is engaged in fundamental research (55%), applied research (36%) or both (7%). The geographical distribution of respondents was: Europe, 41%; U.S., 35%; and Asia/rest of the world, 24%.

**RANKING METHODS OF COMMUNICATION**

The survey asked respondents to list the types of media they preferred to keep abreast of scientific developments. Specialist scientific journals led the pack (81%), a finding that publishers and librarians will find of particular interest. The rankings were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How they keep informed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journals ................ 81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conferences .............. 58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General science journals 32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviews .................. 21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books .................... 20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents were not enthusiastic about other, less formal ways of communicating research results — by fax or telephone, through computer networks or by mail. These results are not surprising, considering the weight scientists traditionally have attached to peer review, a critical element of scientific communication that these alternative communication channels lack at present.

When they were asked which media they preferred to communicate their own new developments in science, respondents listed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How they communicate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer-reviewed specialist journals 67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presenting a paper at a conference 39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussions with direct colleagues 34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussions at conferences 34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer-reviewed general science journals 25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preprints 25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Amsterdam • New York • London • Cambridge • Oxford • Shannon • Lausanne • Paris
SELECTING A JOURNAL

Asked how they decide where to submit articles, the respondents ranked their five principal considerations as follows:

Where they submit papers
- Journal prestige: 69%
- Speed of publication: 56%
- Efficiency: 28%
- International scope: 27%
- Worldwide distribution: 26%

BROWSING HABITS

Though it defies exact measurement, the influence of browsing on scientific communication and even scientific breakthroughs — some refer to it as the Aha! factor — cannot be overlooked. The survey discovered that scientists engage in three distinct kinds of browsing.

About 74% said they engage in general browsing — skimming through one or more items of a cluster of specialist journals, proceedings, reference works, other journals, newsletters, etc. — at least every two or three weeks. Of these, nearly a third (29%) said they browse in a general way more often than that.

Almost 62% said they do specialized browsing related directly to their field, using preprints, drafts and reprints, at least once every two months; 27% of the "specialized browsers" do so more frequently. And nearly 60% of the respondents said they engage in the third kind of browsing — searching a cluster of reviews, online databases, citation indexes and reprints — at least once every quarter; half of them, more often than that.

USAGE PATTERNS

The survey asked respondents which groups of media they used to browse and to study and how often — once a week, between weekly and monthly, and once a year. Not surprisingly, users tend to browse and study the "Journals in my field" most often:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How often they read</th>
<th>WEAKLY</th>
<th>MONTHLY &amp; YEARLY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Browsing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journals in my field</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other journals</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review journals</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proceedings issues</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preprints</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printed abstracts</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journals in my field</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviews</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reprints</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference works</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monographs</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preprints</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SCIENTISTS' CONCERNS

Finally, the survey attempted to measure the concerns scientists have as users of books and journals. The main areas mentioned were having the right tools to select the right information, easier access to information and the ability to retrieve interrelated information from a variety of fields.

Of the respondents who listed specific areas of concern, 30% expressed a desire for improved efficiency through the expanded use of electronics. Twenty-two percent said they were worried about quality, biased peer review practices and the information overload. Twelve percent complained about slow publication speeds, and 10% complained about the costs of journals and books.

INTERPRETING THE DATA

For Elsevier, the survey results reassured us that our current publishing efforts respond to scientists' preferences. But they also challenge us to keep striving to better satisfy the needs of the scientific community. We are committed to rising to that challenge, to publish journals that meet the highest scientific standards, to produce them as quickly and efficiently as we can, and to ensure their wide distribution to readers around the globe.

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