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The Scholarly Publishing Scene: Professional, Scholarly, and other Magazines

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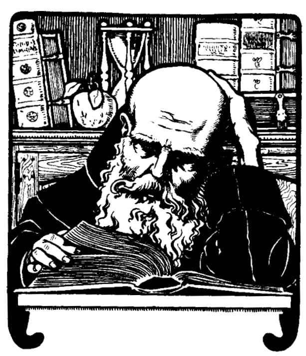
The Scholarly Publishing Scene — Professional, Scholarly and Other Magazines

Column Editor: **Myer Kutz** (President, Myer Kutz Associates, Inc.) <myerkutz@aol.com>

I subscribe to half-a-dozen magazines whose print issues arrive in my mailbox. Included are *The New Yorker* (I began reading it when I was an undergraduate in the late 1950s), *The Nation* (I began reading it in late middle age), *DownBeat* and *Jazz Times* (both cover real jazz, a passion since my teens), and the *New York Review of Books (NYRB)*, started during the New York newspaper strike in the 1960s and in my mailbox or bought on newsstands from the outset, and the *London Review of Books (LRB)*, which I've been taking for the past 10 or 15 years.

Just in case you haven't seen them, these last two publications are tabloid size with text of most articles in four-column format. Readership for both skews academic, I'd guess. I base my hunch not only on the readable scholarly tone and substance of many of the articles (although "readable scholarly" may sound like an oxymoron, in my experience there are many academics in all disciplines who can write clearly and with verve), but also on the plethora of university-based advertising in the *NYRB* and in the case of the *LRB*, back-of-the-book ads for university offerings, such as short courses and conferences about writing.

A recent *NYRB* issue had full-page ads by university presses at **Cornell**, **Toronto**, **Harvard** and **Princeton**, plus a half-page ad by the **University of California Press**. In addition, the **University of North Carolina Press** took over the back cover to advertise eight books, half of them on U.S.-Cuba relations, and the **University of Connecticut** took over the inside front cover to tout its expertise in 3D printing technology.



A recent *LRB* issue had ads from university presses (**Princeton**, **Leuven** and **NYU**), universities (**NYU** again, **King's College London**, **Essex** twice, **Aberystwyth**, **Birmingham**, **Birbeck**, **University of London**, **Georg-August Universitat**, **Cambridge** twice, **King's Lynn** and **Winchester**), plus a boatload of other learned organizations and associations. In addition, many contributors to both publications moonlight as members of the professoriate — or is it the other way around?

After poring over the *LRB's* ads, should readers feel the need, they can turn to the **London Squint Clinic**, whose large notice appears under medical services classifieds. By the way, I would be remiss if I didn't alert you to the book, *They Call Me Naughty Lola: Personal Ads from the London Review of Books*, compiled by **David Ross**, employed at the **MIT Media Lab**, no less. Publishing example: "Employed in publishing? Me too. Stay the hell away. Man on the inside seeks woman on the outside who likes milling around hospitals guessing the illnesses of out-patients. 30-35. Leeds." And if you haven't had enough of *that*, there's a follow-up volume, *Sexually, I'm More of a Switzerland: More Personal Ads from the London Review of Books.*

As if all of the above weren't enough, there are still more magazines that arrive in my mailbox. I get three alumni magazines. Then there are two technical magazines: *Mechanical Engineering* and *Plastics Engineering*, which come to me monthly as a result of my membership in the **American Society of Mechanical Engineers** (**ASME**) and the **Society of Plastics Engineers** (**SPE**).

Publishing flagship magazines like these — both are printed on glossy stock and are colorfully illustrated — is a benefit that major technical societies provide to their members. Some of the magazines are impressive. The **Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE)**, which bills itself as the world's largest professional association (LinkedIn doesn't count, of course), publishes *IEEE Spectrum* monthly with a circulation of over 380,000 worldwide. The **American Chemical Society** (**ACS**), publishes *Chemical & Engineering News (C&EN)* 51 times a year with a staff of over 50 writers and editors. It's the largest magazine covering the chemical industry, Its circulation of over 127,000 is an order of magnitude larger than that of **IHS's** *Chemical Week*, for example.

IEEE Spectrum has been in continuous publication since 1964. (It was a successor to a magazine called *Electrical Engineering.*) *C&EN* has been in continuous publication since 1923. *Mechanical Engineering*, also in the top rank, is much older. It has been in continuous publication since 1880.

According to *Mechanical Engineering's* editor **John Falcioni**, to whom I spoke in late February, **ASME's** membership bounces between 100,000 and 140,000, including 20% international, depending on members' annual dues cycles. The magazine's circulation averages around 120,000 copies. Libraries worldwide, who pay non-member rates, account for 15,000 to 20,000 copies.

Mechanical Engineering's staff numbers just 10. Not so many years ago, the magazine published more pages than it does now until its advertising base was reduced by the Internet alternative that hit most print publications (the ad base has been stable in recent years).

In order to engage a younger readership, *Mechanical Engineering's* design was completely revamped in January 2013 to give the magazine a more contemporary look, according to **Falcioni**. Graphic elements were completely changed, fonts were made more contemporary, and a different color pallet was introduced.

Falcioni told me that the front of the magazine is of particular interest to readers. Besides his own topical column, there is a multipage section called *Tech Buzz*, which features numerous trends and developments of interest to **ASME's** membership, including salary surveys, and a *Vault* page, which features articles published in the magazine decades ago but still of interest. There's no shortage of practitioners and academics who want to write feature articles. *Mechanical Engineering* publishes 35 to 40 a year in total (fewer than used to be published due to the popularity of *Tech Buzz*).

Falcioni reports to the person who runs **ASME's** entire technical publishing program, which includes, among other things, over two dozen scholarly journals. An Editorial

continued on page 52

Optimizing Library Services
from page 50

Resource Management from a Collection Development Perspective." In **N. K. Patra**, **B. Kumar**, and **A. K. Pani** (Eds.), *Progressive Trends on Electronic Resource Management in Libraries* (pp. 17-30). Hershey, PA: IGI-Global.

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The Scholarly Publishing Scene
from page 51

Advisory Board, comprised of just four **ASME** members (*C&EN's* advisory board has 29 members) provides what **Falcioni** called "feedback" during our telephone conversation. He noted that the magazine is "pretty independent from the volunteer structure so that the staff can publish material on a diverse number of topics."

Until his recent untimely death, the board was in the good hands of the outstanding **Bob Nickell**, whom I met back in the late 1980s, when I chaired the **ASME Publications Committee**. At that time, there was a dustup between the **ASME** president (who serves for only a single year) and the editorial staff over the magazine's content. Those of us who were for editorial independence prevailed with the establishment of the advisory board, which consisted for some years of my late friend **Bill Begell**, who ran **Hemisphere**, which published in the thermal sciences area. (**Bill** told me that he survived the Holocaust by simply walking away from a concentration camp one day. He was a teenager. When I heard this story, I responded that I doubted that anything after that day could lay a glove on him. Sadly, that wasn't to hold true.)

Of course, society flagship magazines like the ones I've been talking about are available to members in digital form and with all the bells and whistles that everyone now expects. *Mechanical Engineering's* digital edition is open only to **ASME** members; libraries have to digitize the print edition.

In the case of *C&EN*, around 12% of **ACS** members have changed their access to the magazine from print to electronic copy, according to Wikipedia's latest information, which may be out of date. I haven't bothered to find out if I can change my access to **Mechanical Engineering** from print to electronic. I still like pulling issues out of my mailbox, even though I realize that I should be doing my bit to be more environmentally correct.

Except on rare occasions, I don't read any issue of any magazine from cover to cover as soon as it arrives. (They're still a terrific bargain.) So the magazines pile up in the house. I make sure to keep the number of piles at two, not just because of the clutter factor. I bear in mind something said by my old friend **Eric Proskauer**, refugee from Leipzig in the 1930s (he was another of **Hitler's** unwitting gifts to America) and co-founder of **Interscience**, which merged with **Wiley** in 1962. Interscience published the great, valuable polymer journals; **Eric** knew a thing or two about periodicals. As **Eric** put it, a pile of unread periodicals, with dates on their covers, looks at you with reproach. The gaze from a pile of unread books has much less urgency in it.

Random Ramblings — Rational Individual Decisions that Lead to Irrational Global Consequences

Column Editor: **Bob Holley** (Professor, Library & Information Science Program, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI 48202; Phone: 248-547-0306; Fax: 313-577-7563) <aa3805@wayne.edu>

In a small community somewhere in France, Italy, or Spain, the villagers wish to honor a well-liked and respected couple on their 50th wedding anniversary. Each of the fifty families in the village agrees to empty a jug of wine into a large vessel. The couple happily takes the gift home only to discover that they have nothing but water. Each family made the rational decision that substituting one jug of water for wine wouldn't make a noticeable difference with the forty-nine other contributions of wine. While the above is only a fable, the same principle often applies in today's economy. Corporations in their desire to increase profits have reduced wages, an extremely rational, if heartless, decision. The global consequence, however, is an underperforming American economy because workers have been squeezed to the point that they don't have enough money to buy what the companies are selling, which leads to reduced corporate profits. In the same way, installing solar panels or windmills should cut electricity costs for home owners and make money for them through the sale of any surplus power. The unanticipated consequence is that the electric utilities are finding that they don't have enough revenue to maintain the electrical grid and must build enough capacity to provide electricity when the sun doesn't shine and the wind doesn't blow. The utilities are thus asking for rate increases that undermine any savings from self-generation. I won't even say anything about the negative consequences for the economies of the developed world from couples not having expensive children.

Hiring the Best Faculty Candidate

Most search committees work hard to find the best faculty candidate to hire. The days are long gone when middling schools didn't interview graduates of elite institutions because these candidates wouldn't accept the position. The shortage of faculty positions even in STEM areas has completely changed things so that universities and colleges benefit from a buyer's market. The end result, however, has been a massive change in scholarly communication that has made life difficult for libraries. As the shortage of positions for newly minted PhDs has increased, the rational strategy has become to do whatever possible to become a more desirable candidate. Part of this strategy is to have an increasing number of publications to show the search committee that the candidate will achieve tenure and also enhance the reputation of the institution. When I graduated with my doctorate in 1971, candidates weren't expected to have any publications. This has changed to the point that even undergraduates publish to enhance their potential for academic success. Candidates for tenure-track faculty positions often have three or four publications plus multiple conference presentations and poster sessions. New journals have appeared, and existing journals have increased their page counts to meet the demand for publishing channels. Even if the quality of this higher scholarly output is good, which many doubt, the increased number of journals has stressed library budgets and helped created the current crisis in scholarly communication. Furthermore, the increase has also made life difficult even for journal publishers as static library funding has been spread out over a greater number of potential subscriptions.

Increased Standards for Faculty Tenure and Promotion

The same factors as mentioned in the preceding paragraph apply to faculty who are seeking promotion and tenure. Administrators and Tenure and Promotion committees know that they can demand more because so many candidates are waiting in the wings for an opening. The unanticipated results, however, can be somewhat different and even a bit favorable for the scholarly communication crisis. To give an example, I had a friend who, upon earning tenure, decided to screw the system that had screwed her for six years by taking several years off from publishing. While part of the tenure process is finding faculty who will continue to be productive, merit increments, if they exist, and the possible promotion to full professor don't rationally justify the push for maximum publication for those who have made it over the tenure hurdle. Even the dedicated faculty member may now decide to focus less on the quantity and more on the quality of the publications.

Getting the Best Price

In these tough economic times, a rational strategy for collection development librarians is to negotiate the best price. While I admit that this strategy is less likely to have negative global consequences, they can occur. Libraries want vendors and publishers to stay in business to provide the services and materials that the libraries want. To do so, these companies need to make a profit. If the vendor pool in any area shrinks too much, the remaining players can increase prices as competition lessens. The most dangerous situation occurs when a company is facing bankruptcy and decides to lower prices as a last-ditch effort to remain solvent. If this strategy does not succeed in saving the failing firm, libraries may find themselves losing

continued on page 53