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## Chaos-Journals Electronic Style

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# Chaos — Journals Electronic Style

by **Chuck Hamaker** (LSU)

Column Editors: **Sandra K. Paul** (President, SKP Associates) and **Albert Simmonds** (Director, ISBN —US Agency, R.R. Bowker)

Have you paid for them? Can you access them?

Typical of the electronic chaos libraries are encountering are offers by some of the most significant and prestigious sci-tech titles published today to register directly with them for electronic access if there is an institutional subscription. Although such publishers often are on the leading edge of experimentation and design in creating such products, because they are using inefficient means to promote access to, and grant sales registration for some extremely innovative products, their efforts may be ignored by the very audiences they are trying to serve because of the difficulty and complexity of accessing these products.

In the fields of Physics and Astronomy, the typical academic library subscribes to journals from such prestigious associations as the **American Institute of Physics** <<http://www.aip.org/ojs/service.html>> the **Institute of Physics** <<http://www.iop.org/EJ/welcome>>, the **Optical Society of America** <<http://www.osa.org/catalog.ems-olj.htm>> and the **American Astronomical Society** <<http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/ApJletter.html>> all of which require the institutional subscriber to contact them directly, not necessarily to pay for subscriptions, but to set up registration for access to the electronic versions of their standard print journals. Notification for libraries of availability of what are often incredibly innovative sites is often haphazard. To whom it may concern letters, or even worse, non-personalized brochures sent as almost random mailings do not reach decision-makers. Many publishers seem to be ignoring agencies who have real people

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*“Hook from indexes to library holdings is nice, but hook to content is the ideal.”*

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contacts in libraries and the names of individuals who can actually respond to offers of “free” dual products.

The statement below, lifted verbatim, is typical of instructions to institutions regarding site registration:

“To sign up for online access to the Proceedings of the National Academy of Science which is working with Stanford’s HighWire Press (see <<http://highwire.stanford.edu/>> for the full list of titles the following instructions are given <<http://www.pnas.org/>>)

1) Follow your usual “new serial” ordering procedures to subscribe to PNAS Online. a) send payment to your subscription agent or b) send payment by check, money order, or draft to PNAS.. 2) Once PNAS has received payment for PNAS Online, you will receive a letter with instructions on how to register for online access in 1998. The letter will direct you to an online registration form. To activate your online subscription, you will need • your institution’s IP address; • The name, title, phone, fax, and email of the institutional contact person for the online subscription; • Your Access Code number (will be included with the letter). Payment for PNAS Online subscriptions can be accepted through subscription agents, but the online registration form may not be completed by agents. The Proceedings Office will handle all administration of online registration directly with the

subscriber.”

By my estimate (and this is pure guess),

there are well over 3,000 scholarly and electronic journals currently available that were previously only available in print. A significant number of those titles are standard titles, held widely by academic libraries. And again, by my best guess, 40-60% or more of those titles are “free” with the print subscription. How can any single library find all of them AND get registered for access? The instruction that institutions register “directly” is very common. Publishers who think libraries can identify their availability easily are in for a surprise when their generous offers are ignored. The institution that has done the best job I am aware of in identifying such titles is **Oxford University**. Their site at <<http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/ejournals/>> is the best I have seen in listing a large number of standard scholarly journals available to their users. I wonder if journal publishers recognize the immense effort it will take for libraries to individually 1) Deduce that they have an electronic product; 2) Know that if they “register” their users can access the titles; 3) Have the manpower to do individual site recognition and registration, i.e., contact the publisher or society; 4) Link to the title in some organized fashion; and 5) Provide a hotlink out of the local OPAC to the titles.

Many titles require the type of “registration” that PNAS does. The problem for libraries is noticing that “letter” that PNAS refers to. One of the worst examples I’ve seen of “notification” was a publisher’s glossy flyer announcing 1998 “rights.” Besides not knowing who to contact at the library, the publisher produced a flyer that looked just like the hundreds of thousands of other flyers routinely used to advertise subscriptions. Will the student doing check-in at a terminal notice a letter insert, a glossy bifold? Or anything except the issue he is checking in? Will it be the clerk checking the invoices from our vendors who gets the “letter”? Or will it more likely as happens with most of the “comes with” pieces of paper we get, be received by the circular file?

In a significant effort to ameliorate some of the chaos of those 3,000 plus electronic publications that “come with” print, a number of middle systems are being developed to provide a common interface and approach to the bewildering variety of e-journal front ends and access modes. Not all publishers, of course, are cooperating with these mid-system or interface system suppliers. And although a list of the hundreds of “comes with” electronic journals would certainly be helpful, just for the manpower to track down each title and each publisher, contact them, and register, contact the most obvious user community, and train those faculty or students how to access and navigate each different title or publisher site boggles the mind.

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Reorganizing the inherent complexity of this developing situation, a few of the mid-system interface developers have been at work creating unitary approaches to some of the difficulties inherent for libraries and their patrons in the current situation. Though the list may seem long, it is quite brief compared to learning the vagaries of each site. Personally, short of a full-time staff member dedicated to the task, I don't think any institution can even identify all the titles it has "rights" to. I apologize to any systems being developed I've left out of this list. They are not in any particular order.

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*"Users are no longer content, nor should libraries be, with unconnected, unlinked information to navigate through the world's electronic information."*

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**ECO, Electronic Collection Online** (OCLC's project with about a dozen scholarly publishers) is described at <http://www.oclc.org/oclc/menu/eco.htm>. One aspect of their current projects is to make more than 350 journals available at no extra cost to libraries subscribing to their service and the print versions of the journals. Cooperating publishers at this stage include: **Blackwell Publishers, Carfax Publishing, Institution of Mechanical Engineers, Kluwer Academic Publishers, MIT Press, Royal Society of Chemistry and Scandinavian University Press.**

**Blackwell's Electronic Journal Navigator service EJN** now lists 555 journals to which they can provide access. For an explanation of their service and a current list, see <http://navigator.blackwell.com/#info>.

**Information Quest**, a newly formed **Dawson Holdings PLC** company, is providing a front end search engine and access to over a dozen publishers' electronic publications focusing on electronic journal titles. They also have some monographic reference titles. The list of titles and publishers they are currently able to index for libraries is at <http://www.informationquest.com/content.html>. The homepage for the company is <http://www.informationquest.com/company.html>.

**SwetsNet** offers a service connecting users to publisher's electronic offerings. The homepage for the Service is <http://www.swetsnet.nl/>. They state: the lists of journals available via SwetsNet are arranged alphabetically or by subject, by publisher, or new Full Text titles.

**Ovid** indicates that it provides "enhanced electronic fulltext to more than 350 of the world's leading scientific, academic, and medical journals." Their title list is heavily medical. For a current list, see <http://www.ovid.com/> and follow the link "Ovid full text."

**EBSCO** announced in June of this year the name of its new service, **EBSCO Online™**, a Web-based electronic journal service. For that announcement, see <http://www.ebsco.com/ess/news/ebsconline.asp>.

In addition to these service systems, all standard subscription agencies are equipped to handle "electronic" journals. **Harrassowitz**, for example, identifies over 850 electronic titles

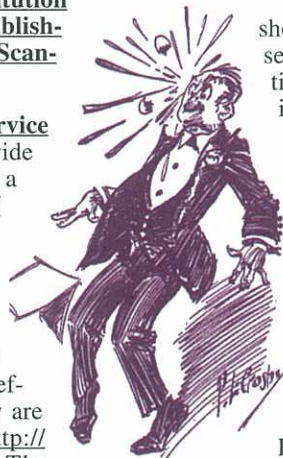
they can provide subscriptions to and is working actively with **HighWire Press**. But, quite often for online journals, subscription agency assistance is, by publisher design, fairly limited. They can normally handle payment, and probably assist the library in identifying publisher sites and contacts, but usually cannot "connect" the institution to the journals it has rights to. A number of publishers have created their own "electronic" distribution or access services and only a few are doing much in terms of cooperating with the mid-system developers I've mentioned. The largest and probably best know commercial publishers with

their "own" approaches are those of major sci-tech publishers such as **Elsevier, Academic Press, Springer, Blackwell Publisher, Blackwell's Science**, and literally a HOST of others. Many of the products of these presses are not available at this time through the more comprehensive middle-systems being developed, though some publishers, notably the **Blackwell companies, MCB,**

**Thomson and Carfax**, seem to be cooperating with most of the various systems being developed. Again, because of how quickly the landscape is changing, I may be missing many other publishers who are cooperating with these developers who often offer uniform front-end and access arrangements for multiple publishers.

Perhaps, though, what I have not seen yet, which should be a natural piece of the puzzle to provide users seamless service to electronic resources their institutions have the rights to access, is links out of standard indexes to these same titles. Technically, for example, there should be no reason **Cambridge Scientific Abstracts** couldn't link any institution's users directly to journals and articles the institution has the right to access. In fact, if the major sci-tech indexes are to remain relevant in the rapidly-evolving environment, they should be negotiating for the right to provide access through the Net to those titles. Otherwise, the problem of getting a user from pointer to text might well continue to be very frustrating. Hook from indexes to library holdings is nice, but hook to content is the ideal.

Recently, a faculty member called me to complain that she had to move from one of our online indexes to our online catalog and then to our document delivery service to get to an article. Though this may seem trivial to some, in fact in the evolving electronic environment her complaint was absolutely right. There is no technical reason for such to-ing and fro-ing. Users are no longer content, nor should libraries be, with unconnected, unlinked information to navigate through the world's electronic information. Holdings information is NOT a substitute for access. The link to the real thing is technically feasible. If



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*"It's up to the subscription, mid-system, indexing, publisher, and library community to make what is technically feasible possible."*

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library and index systems now in existence can't or won't do that, then they run the risk of obsolescence.

It's up to the subscription, mid-system, indexing, publisher, and library community to make what is technically feasible possible. Let's put an end to this particular piece of CHAOS through cooperation. 