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Author Care: The Rights Publishers Offer and What Authors Think

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The old saying that it's a good policy not to bite the hand that feeds you applies in many contexts, including the academic and professional publishing arena. Simply put, it's sound business to take care of the authors whose very research efforts and scholarly writing culminate in a journal owned by a publisher.

Without those contributions of intellect that traditionally get submitted to academic and professional publishers, there would be no journals. And while the publisher does incur significant costs in the development and maintenance of activities that support the editorial function, authors don't receive much in the way of direct payments.

"For centuries scientific publishing has worked on a bizarre economic model," writes **Jane Smith**, deputy editor of the *British Medical Journal* (*BMJ*).¹ "The real producers of raw material, the researchers, have received no direct payment for their work. In return for publication they have received exposure, 'findability' for their work (thanks to bibliographical databases provided by others), and the 'imprimatur' of peer review. Since peer review is an imperfect process,² exposure and findability are probably the more important benefits."³

So just what rights, policies, and benefits are publishers offering to support their authors and demonstrate their appreciation? And what do authors think of those rights in relation to what they value?

Not surprisingly, the level of TLC offered by authors varies from publisher to publisher. And while a number of rights and benefits may appear very similar from one organization and another, in practice it may be a whole different ball of wax.

I got to see some of this disparity firsthand, and it always surprised me that the differences in practice could be so significant.

When I worked in an acquisitions editor role on behalf of a publisher, I interacted with owners of publications, some of them editors themselves, and sometimes with competitors bidding on some of the same journal titles. The publisher I represented had a suite of useful, fair, and innovative rights and proactive initiatives that was always backed by a live human being with whom the editor or author could communicate on a timely basis.

So expounding on the benefits and care that the editorial and author pool would receive within the auspices of the publisher I

represented was easy. I always had the privilege of candidly conveying to the owner of the publication whose title we were interested in acquiring that the organization I represented had an infrastructure of author and editor mindfulness that was simply tradition and part of the company's fiber. And to my surprise, it was a feature that became a point of competitive advantage.

Sometimes the owners would share tales of what they wished they had been able to do for their authors. Other times they'd share how my competitor didn't have such initiatives on their radar screen at all, see the importance of an author care program, or was even close to offering what the publisher I represented had been doing and improving on for decades.

Fortunately, there are many publishers who have active, healthy initiatives in support of their authors and editors. Given the advancements in technology that enable publishers to offer faster submission-to-publication cycles and wider dissemination of articles, authors are taking these perks into consideration and will sometimes choose to offer their material to one publisher versus the other if they perceive that one is superior at these processes. Publishers who offer attractive author and editor care programs stand a much better chance of not losing good papers to a competitor. Let's see what some of them are doing and what a few authors think.

Care Initiatives & Author Input

BMJ offers its authors a number of perks. Early last year they decided to start sharing some of their revenue from commercial reprints with authors, and a portion of what they don't pass on to authors to increase the exposure of author papers.

Instead of requesting that authors assign their rights to the publication, *BMJ* requests an exclusive license. This gives *BMJ* nearly the same level of control as previously, but authors also benefit from having the rights revert back to them in 12 months' time, if *BMJ* hasn't exploited these rights in that time frame.

"The most important rights the authors have are probably the rights to do what they like with the article without asking our permission," says Smith, "so long as it's not commercial. So they can copy it for teaching, put it in their institution web site, or put it in a book of their own."⁴

BMJ offers authors 10% of reprint or translation revenues on orders over £1,000. Orders that are worth more than £1,000 rep-

resent approximately 93% of their commercial reprint business. The publisher asks the author to provide a nomination of an individual or entity, such as a department or a research group, to be the payment recipient.

BMJ says they're unable to share revenues on smaller orders because the costs of administering such smaller payments would be exceedingly high. According to *BMJ*, they can only share a small percentage of revenues with authors because they need the money to offset the cost of publishing their journal and of maintaining the electronic version, *bmj.com*, free to users.⁵

The publisher informs its authors of their print and electronic rights in the *BMJ/bmj.com* license for publication, which all authors are requested to sign. While they have no particular mechanisms in place to obtain feedback from authors on what they'd like to see, Smith points out that they'd certainly consider suggestions passed on to them. "Authors rarely write to us about rights," says Smith. "And when they do, it's usually to say that they can't grant a license because they're government employees or their work is crown copyright. And, in those cases, we accept the exceptions, of course."

Another publishing body that's keen to offer benefits to its core of authors and editors is **The Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC)**.

RSC authors are able to retain copyright in the "work," which typically consists of the paper or similar contribution, as well as supplementary material that may accompany it. "The owner may reproduce or republish portions of the paper without seeking permission from the **RSC**," says **Dr. Adrian Kybett**, publisher of *General and Applied Chemistry Journals and Reviews*, "provided that any republication is accompanied by a suitable acknowledgement to the published article." If the author wishes to have the full paper reproduced or republished, she must submit the request in writing.⁶

As with the *BMJ*, authors writing for **RSC** are asked to sign a document when they submit articles, which is how **RSC** conveys to its authors the rights offered to them. In this case, it's a copyright license that authors must sign. And as with *BMJ*, **RSC** doesn't have a formal mechanism in place to obtain author feedback.

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Unlike most commercial publishers, the RSC surplus revenue from journal publishing is earmarked to promote and support chemistry, mostly in the UK.

However, the model is changing, **Dr. Kybett** explains. "In recognition that dissemination of chemical knowledge is a truly international activity for the RSC—knowing no boundaries in academic or industrial research and because 80% of our authors and 90% of the journal revenue comes from outside the UK, the RSC Council has introduced the new policy of making some of the surplus from publishing available to international authors who support RSC journals by publishing in them."

RSC offers individual grants of up to £2,000 in support of collaborative research, exchanges of ideas and results, and special training. The funds can be applied toward airfare, lodging, and food for author visits to other countries.

Authors need to have made at least three publication contributions within the previous five years to RSC journals, as a way of satisfying the Society's scientific and authorship requirements. About 100 grants are made available yearly.

The program is receiving positive responses from both professors visiting international laboratories as well as from researchers at the host labs.

Professor Robert Crabtree works in the Chemistry Department at **Yale University**, and he says the travel grants RSC provides to authors is a benefit he finds especially attractive. "I had one such author from France with me over the summer," he says. "They also give wide distribution to our papers, and their international reputation is very high—that reflects on authors' work in their journals." As an author, he finds that in addition to sound distribution, the most important, reasonable provisions that a publisher can offer its authors are effective electronic handling processes and accurate and rapid publication.⁷

MCB University Press represents a commercial publisher who also has one of the most active programs in the industry both to support their research and writing efforts as well as to assist them with their editorial functions. It offers some of the rights and benefits that both *BMJ* and the RSC provide to their authors as well as some others. While the company does retain copyright of articles it publishes, authors are given liberal rights to use their own works without seeking permission. They can republish or reproduce their paper in print or electronically for non-commercial purposes, subject to the acknowledgement of first publication specifications.⁸

Mick Tamas is a manager of Field Operations for **ShareMax**, a company that provides an online strategic sourcing platform for corporations to reduce expenditures while enhancing its supplier relationship. As a practitioner who has written for MCB on supply chain management issues, he says, "Maintaining your rights regarding your own work is critical. I believe if I were restricted in photocopying my own article or posting it on my firm's Web site, I would be upset," he says. "However, MCB doesn't restrict these. I would expect, particularly if I'm not compensated financially for my work, that I'm given access to certain publications, particularly the journal I was published in." Speaking of other author provisions he feels are highly important and reasonable are the "critical review of my work, or support with developing a thesis."⁹

MCB authors are entitled to a 20% royalty fee from article reprints, and the share is paid out when royalties have accrued to £50. They are also informed when their article has been subsequently disseminated, and they're informed before MCB provides permissions. Even where MCB owns the copyright, authors have the right to veto the requested permission.¹⁰

The research grants offered by MCB to its authors are different from the ones offered by the RSC, and while they do share a similarity in providing a support structure for the author community, the twist is different. According to **Kathryn Toledano**, director of Business Development for MCB, "We have earmarked up to £25,000, approximately \$36,000, per annum to set up a research trust fund," she explains. "Trustees are respected academics and librarians drawn from our network of editors. They are responsible for allocating, on an annual basis, funds drawn from the trust to support academic research in the disciplines covered by one or more of MCB's titles. The trust's funds are drawn from copyright fees and received by MCB."¹¹

Like *BMJ* and the RSC, MCB authors first learn of their rights when they complete a form, in their case a **Journal Article Record (JAR)**, whose dual purpose is to assign copyrights to MCB as well as inform authors of their entitlements. But MCB also offers a more formal mechanism beyond the JAR to inform them of their rights and benefits and to provide feedback.

The **Author's Charter** is a document, available also on their Website, which provides authors with a detailed listing of all the rights and benefits they're entitled to receive with MCB. Through its **Literati Club**—a mechanism established years ago to support author and editor research—hot topic areas, networking, scholarly writing suggestions for new and established authors and editors, and email alerts are all part of the benefits. It's a free service to which all contributors are automatically eligible.¹²

Other innovative initiatives offered by MCB to scholars are **Author Workshops** and its **Awards for Excellence**. They've conducted numerous workshops in the USA, Mexico, South Africa, and other regions of the world based at academic institutions. These learning events have also received much support from the librarian community.

"There's a celebration of excellence in scholarly publishing through our support of the **Literati Awards for Excellence**, an annual bash at which authors and editors are presented with awards," explains **Toledano**. "Editors in participating journals consult their review boards to solicit views on the best articles published in the last volume. These authors are subsequently awarded, and feedback informs us that this can often make the difference in their career progression."¹³

The **Awards for Excellence** combines the recognition of scholarly excellence with a stipend of recognition to the winners. "We share in their celebration of excellence by providing 10 leading editors with financial awards of £1,000, or about \$1,400. The **Editor of the Year** receives £2,000, or approximately \$3,500, and lots of recognition," she says. "The networking opportunities at the annual event are deemed useful, and editors are also invited to join a half day workshop."

So ultimately what does **Tamas** think of the perks? "Overall, I'm pleased with my rights and benefits as an author for MCB," he says. "The key benefits it offers that I find particularly attractive include the membership to the **Literati Club**, notification of articles of interest, and permission to access MCB published articles."¹⁴

Food for (Current & Future) Thought

Keeping the eye on the ball regarding care for authors and editors is not an easy task. But it is an important activity, one that publishers such as *BMJ*, the RSC, and MCB have committed to. We've seen that offering valuable benefits not only extends the goodwill and credibility with authors and editors, but it also makes good business sense.

Tamas offers some suggestions to publishers and specific insights into what he finds motivating both for himself and in relation to a publisher. "My motivation as an author is primarily to become disciplined in a particular area of my profession," he says. "This, however, is easily put off if not for the motivation to actually complete a document which is published by a respected journal.

"Having a publisher ensure that their publication is well respected and widely recognized is very important and clearly even more beneficial to the publisher." He also cites having the opportunity to become a member of a professional network that is well respected is crucial to remaining professionally current.

Dr. Ronald Goldsmith, a professor in the Marketing Department, College of Business,

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at **Florida State University**, also an author for **MCB** journals, shares some ideas on publisher responsibilities to authors. In his assessment, publishers should be able to ensure that the author: receives knowledgeable and objective reviews of his intellectual property, is provided with timely input on reviews and publication, and is given professional editorial assistance whose suggestions are agreed to by the author. Adequate publicity of the author's work is also, he says, reasonable to expect.¹⁵

But the relationship is a two-way process that fails to function properly if the author simply waits for all to be dropped on his lap. "Publishers should think clearly and completely about what they want to guarantee

authors by way of rights," says **Goldsmith**, "and then state these clearly so that authors understand what their own responsibilities are vis-à-vis the publisher."

The key to a successful author care program that's sustainable and fair must be based on mutual trust that can only develop when both publisher and author keep their respective ends of the collaborative bargain. This is not an on-off process. It's an iterative event that requires commitment and a willingness by the publisher to continually review what's being offered, how it can be improved, and seek author feedback. It equally requires the commitment of the author to take an active part in becoming informed about what's offered, produce high quality scholarship, and provide constructive suggestions to the publisher.

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Digital Archiving: A Work in Progress

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The field of digital archiving is new in human history and presents a wealth of challenges exacerbated by the increasing rapidity with which the associated technologies are evolving. To grapple with the issues involved, let's take a stroll along the river of time.

Then to Now (sans digital)

The earliest archives can easily be blamed on happenstance. We are just fortunate that pigments, hidden from sunlight on cave walls and which didn't get washed with water and minerals, tended to endure. And that another early publishing media, chiseled stone, just happened to weather very well—or at least until our modern industrial age invented acid rain.

But in the more formal history of archiving that has accompanied the time of commercial publishing, which covers the last 500 years, the medium has been ink and paper. Archival efforts were driven by a few key goals whose constitution varied from archival body to archival body. These basically came down to preserving material for research, for cultural heritage, for legal reasons, and for consumer interest.

Traditionally there has been a separation between the libraries and archives.¹ In the experience of some there is rarely a library budget item for archiving.² Much of the formal archiving is done as an internal support structure as **Rick Anderson**, Electronic Resources/Serials Coordinator, The University

Libraries, **University of Nevada**, puts it — "a kind of defensive mode" — designed to make sure documents will be available for future needs. Libraries, on the other hand, usually operate under the guise of research and personal study support, and public interest support.³

Selection of what to archive and what not to archive has been a combination of the goals of the institution and its funding. The resulting criteria varies amongst archiving bodies. **Anderson** simplifies it nicely into two core criteria: the beautiful and the useful. How each institution defines those depends upon their motivation to archive.⁴ Who is it that said, "History is written by the archivists?"

Technical issues have been minimal for print media. As **Kathryn Toledano**, director of Business Development for **MCB University Press**, succinctly puts it, "We just had to make sure it kept dry and didn't burn."⁵ Certainly there are other issues like acidity and humidity, but they basically amount to the details.

The remaining piece of the archive puzzle is access. An archive serves little benefit if people can't get to that which is being archived. Funds bought shelves in buildings. Librarians provided expert locating of material for those who sought research, scholarly, or professional assistance. And the education many people received early in life provided the basic skills necessary to read the materi-

als. So the primary issues with access, such as education, shelves, and building distribution, tended to be outside the archival process.

Now (media stew)

The infusion of digital media in our information stream hasn't changed the basic goals behind archiving. According to **Regina Reynolds**, Head of the National Serials Data Program at the **Library of Congress**, "Our reasons are the same as those of any civilizations which have recorded and preserved the output of their culture for thousands of years." And, as she points out, **George Santayana** gave us a more compelling reason: "Those who do not learn from the past are condemned to repeat it."⁶

Beyond that similarity with the pure print archiving history, everything is up for grabs.

The boundaries between traditional libraries and archives are blurring in the realm of digital media. "We're really talking about finding a way to preserve our cultural and intellectual heritage at a time when that heritage is increasingly finding its expression in highly ephemeral contexts and formats," says **Anderson**.⁷ With the variety of technologies

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