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## The Future Should Be Cute?

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# “The Future Should Be Cute”?

by **Karen Hunter** (Senior Vice President, Elsevier Science)

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“So the millennium is just around the corner—get over it; get on with it,” proclaims the December 28th cover of *USA Weekend*, the newspaper insert. This message is part of a **Mary Engelbreit** illustration (ladies, you know her—she generates a gazillion gift items with perky girls and lots of flowers). Engelbreit says she wants “a future where everything is bright and clean. The future should be cute.”

Imagine a librarian or a publisher at the end of 1998 saying “the future should be cute.” We might say “exciting” or “challenging” or even “bearable”—but certainly not “cute.” We are too serious for that. Our world looks too uncertain, even perilous, to talk about “cute.” And we certainly aren’t ready to give up on our end-of-the-world (oops, millennium) hand-wringing.

So, what’s the picture at this year-end stocktaking? Are we moving ahead—getting on with it?

At the **Charleston Conference** in November I started the (scheduled, formal) debate with **Chuck Hamaker** with some reflections on three ages of journal publishing. The first was 280 years, from 1665 to 1945. The first journals were published in England and France in 1665 by scholars and scholarly societies. In the subsequent years, there was relatively little involvement of either commercial publishers or libraries. Yes, academic libraries acquired journals and made them available to their communities (and complained early in this century about the extraordinary growth in the literature), but libraries were not the critical market they were to become for publishers.

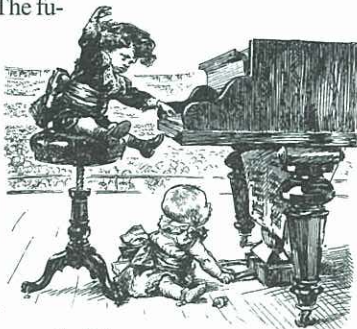
After the War (that’s World War II, for you youngsters), we entered the second phase. The internationalization particularly of scientific and technical research led to the switch to English as a common publication language. Certain publishers in Europe saw this first (e.g., the Czech-in-English-clothing, **Robert Maxwell**). Most American societies, still the dominant American journal publishers, had a large enough community of authors and readers within their national boundary not to move so rapidly to internationalize.

At the same time, particularly post-Sputnik (1957), campuses expanded and cloned rapidly, with new branches and enhanced facilities in the 1960s and early 1970s. There were new libraries on these campuses, eager to build science and technology collections (as well as buy in other areas). Scientific disciplines were, at the same time, doing their

own “branching,” with the well-known “twigging” phenomenon. Each new disciplinary offshoot developed its own societies and journals.

This was the incredible growth period for journals and journal publishers. While it was clear that it could not go on forever, the speed of the decline was unanticipated. One can argue about the beginning of the end, but financially it was over by the early-to-mid 1980s and the Web drove the technological stake in the heart of the present era by 1995. If we want to round off to the millennium, the second phase of journal publishing was still less than 20% of the length of the first.

We are now in starting the third phase and are actually in limbo, where “we” means certainly librarians and publishers and maybe scholars as well. As described in the extremely thoughtful book: *The Mirage of Continuity: Reconfiguring Academic Information Resources for the 21st Century* [edited by **Brian L. Hawkins** and **Patricia Battin**, CLIR and AAU, 1998], the digital environment calls for a transformation, not just of the library but also of its parent university and of the nature of the information resources provided.



So where are we now—and what, to refer to my musings of past years—keeps me awake at night? Let’s turn from broad philosophy to some practical issues.

1) **Digitization of back volumes**—The apparent success of **JSTOR** (it’s a little early, but it sure looks good) to reduce the very real costs of storing paper back volumes and the increased access that comes from having digital files leads to the need for publishers to reconsider digitizing backfiles. The presumption had been that there wasn’t enough interest to warrant the cost of digitization. But the **AIP** and **APS**, for example, have converted backfiles of many physics titles. Is this something the rest of us should consider? Some European libraries are asking **STM** publishers to give them the right to digitize, if the publishers themselves are not planning on doing so. Interesting issue: all input welcome.

2) **Responsibility for long-term archiving**—Old issue, but it stays on my list. More than ever, I think the signals have to come from the library community as to what, realistically, you want. We are ready to have serious discussions, but the consensus to date seems to be only that there’s not a desire for the publishers to hold the electronic archives. But what is the alternative?

3) **Access after cancellation**—This is a related, yet separate issue. This year has brought much more focus on “what happens to access when I stop paying current fees?” There were misguided efforts to legislate permanent access to anything once subscribed to. While I understand the problem, this is not the solution. It would mean each online provider maintaining in perpetuity subscription records for each discrete file for all customers. (If that would be required, it would

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Meyers Consulting Services  
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**Professional Activities:** Barbara began her career in scholarly communications in 1974 as an editorial assistant and has worked in progressively more senior positions in both non-profits (including the **American Chemical Society**, the **National Academy of Sciences**, and the **Chamber of Commerce** of the United States) as well as some commercial firms. In 1993, she founded an independent consulting practice to help associations, professional societies, and commercial publishers increase their efficiencies and improve the dissemination of their materials. She served as President of the **Council of Biology Editors (CBE)** and still sits on the current Board of Directors as Past President while also chairing the Administrative Committee and Nominating Committee. She is currently a volunteer member of the **American Diabetes Association's** Publications Policy Committee and the **American Institute of Biological Sciences' Publications Committee**. She was also one of the co-founders of the **Society for Scholarly Publishing** (1978).

**Avocations:** Books, Japanese netsuke, movies, museums, music, and lectures as such as the GWSAE Distinguished Lecture Series on Leadership.

**Last Book Read:** *Einstein's Dreams, A Novel* by Alan Lightman.

**Pet Peeves:** Rudeness and unkindness.

**Favorite Quote** (currently): "Nature has given us one tongue, but two ears, that we may hear from others twice as much as we speak." Epictetus, Greek Philosopher. 🌿

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be an incentive to work with subscription agents and transfer that headache to them!) For a large publisher, the answer is also not in delivering CDs to those who cancel. Consider if every two-year college that decided not to continue in a consortium agreement had to receive the hundreds of CDs that would represent even one year's subscription to those 1,000+ **Elsevier Science** journals that they had access to as part of the consortium. That's not realistic.

Our present alternative is to make a distinction between current (3 years) and backfile. The current file is part of the current subscription (and records can be maintained to provide access for those who just canceled). After three years, all access to the older volumes—by anyone—would mean a modest charge. That raises a number of interesting issues: what is "modest;" is the backfile open to all, even if they have no current subscriptions—heaven forbid, even individuals; and do current subscribers to the title get a discount. Sticky questions—but good for late nights.

4) **Licensing**—As **Don Waters** says in *The Mirage of Continuity* (pp. 200-202), licensing has found an accepted place in library-publisher relations. Indeed, it was with some glee that I noted recent e-list comments on the need for **HighWire Press** to adopt a licensing regime. But there linger some real concerns because licenses create a different situation as to use than does a sale. One of the highlights of 1998 for me has been participation in a **National Research Council** study committee on "Intellectual Property and

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vider of Web services and utilities for small businesses—and independent publishers, soon after **Microsoft** initiated the purchase of **LinkExchange**, a similar business, according to *Internet World*. Many of us have used Web Site Garage or Web Site Post Office, two of **AtWeb's** offerings. Will Web sites become as formulaic as network television programs?

**Conclusion: to be continued.** Before my trip to planet Potential Sources, I had a simple impression of publisher mergers and acquisitions, an impression derived from a stream of listserv messages and random perusal of news sources. My mind applied the term "publishing" in a serial fashion: companies publish books, and/or other media like magazines, papers, CD-ROMs, or Web sites, but the products seemed discrete, other than the best-selling book with the movie option and licensed characters.

Thanks to my investigative travels, "pub-

the Emerging Information Infrastructure." Our report is in the works and I'm not allowed to leak it. But there is an interesting discussion on what constitutes "publication" in an electronic era of licensed access and what is the public's right to access licensed materials.

5) **Metadata**—Big buzz word this year. As an advocate of the **DOI**, I've had to learn more about metadata than I ever wanted to know. But it is clear that we will not succeed in creating links between and among digital information (to say nothing of e-commerce, for those so inclined) without a more rigorous, standardized metadata system.

6) **Linking**—In that connection, I worry still about linking. The messages I get are fuzzy as to what links—what "seamlessness"—libraries and their users want. Is it really desirable to create a raft of links (as in **PubMed**) that lead hopeful users to the door of the fulltext, only to be denied access because there is no authorization (i.e., no institutional subscription)? I worry that this creates frustration. And we don't seem collectively ready yet to encourage the alternative—direct sale of the article to the end user.

7) **Pricing**—What better place to end. We have been learning from the **PEAK** experiment in pricing that we are doing with the **University of Michigan** and look forward to sharing that with you in 1999. There are other things in the works as well—but this is not an easy area for any publisher or librarian.

So, is the future "cute"? I don't think so. But we need not be somber either. The things I worry about are susceptible to resolution if there are good faith discussions and a continuing willingness to work to find solutions. Happy New Year. See you around. 🌿

lishing" will never again imply a serial activity. Publishers are combining products in ways previously not possible, and simultaneously conduct activities in board rooms in London and Munich and in offices and showrooms and through digital packets in our neighborhoods.

Although I may not have gained a better understanding of what, at bottom, is driving media combinations, I can at least visualize them where they exist: in three dimensions, affecting the ways you and I communicate via the Internet, the telephone, our local directories, newspapers, and television stations, as well as influencing the prices we pay for books and our choice of where we buy them. The Gorgon's face is as now as familiar and unremarkable to me as a neighbor's face over the mailbox, no longer paralyzing. But is that a good thing? I have not calculated, and therefore have not reported to you, the portion of articles I used to prepare this column that were, regardless of vehicle title, ultimately published by a company called "Thomson." But that portion was very high. 🌿