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Scholarly societies: Pricing models for online journals

by **Katharine E. Duff** (Special Projects Manager, University of Chicago Press, Journals Division) <kduff@journals.uchicago.edu>

Scholarly and professional societies are looking increasingly to online (Internet) publishing as a means to disseminate their journals. How are societies pricing their online journals? In this article, I present a representative snapshot (rather than an exhaustive survey) of the current pricing models used in online societal publishing. The data were compiled from a fairly extensive, if not entirely systematic, Web survey of online societal journals, found mainly through the **Scholarly Societies Project of the University of Waterloo Electronic Library** (<http://www.lib.uwaterloo.ca/society/overview.html>) and the **NewJour** archive of electronic journals (<http://gort.ucsd.edu/newjour/>).

Since a plethora of online publications lay claim to the title of "online journal," I needed to first define the scope of my survey. I included both electronic editions of existing print journals and electronic-only journals, but I limited my search to journals that published online the fulltext of articles. Journals that provided only Tables of Contents, abstracts or selected fulltext articles were excluded. I also excluded journals that made articles available only through an online database (i.e., the journal had to be the point of entry). I concentrated on journals publishing peer-reviewed articles or substantive research reviews; newsletters and magazines aimed at a more popular audience were not considered.

I collected the data on pricing model(s) from the society's or publisher's Web site. If the Web site indicated that the pricing model would change in 1999, I used the upcoming model whenever possible. Only the prices for institutional access were included, since they were likely to be of the most interest to *ATG* readers. The societies in my survey used thirteen distinct pricing models:

Pricing models for journals with both print and electronic editions

Model 1. Print edition for subscription price, electronic edition freely accessible by all.

Model 2. Bundled: print edition for subscription price, electronic access included.

Model 3. Print edition for subscription price, electronic access costs extra.

Model 4. Print edition for subscription price, electronic edition available as part of journal package.

Model 5. Option of print or electronic editions, at same or different price.

Model 6. Option of bundled (model 2) or electronic edition only, at same or different price.

Model 7. Option of print plus electronic for extra cost (model 3) or electronic edition only.

Model 8. Option of print plus electronic for extra cost (model 3) or part of journal package (model 4).

Model 9. Option of print plus electronic for extra cost (model 3), part of journal package (model 4) or electronic edition only.

Pricing models for electronic-only journals

Model 10. Electronic journal freely accessible by all.

Model 11. Electronic journal for subscription price.

Model 12. Option of electronic journal for subscription price (model 11) or as part of journal package.

Pricing models with no institutional access

Model 13. Journals with print and electronic editions or electronic-only journals, with no institutional access to the electronic edition.

The societies included in the survey were diverse; 87 in total, belonging to the general sciences (GS), biomedical sciences (BM), physical and mathematical sciences (PM), humanities (H), social sciences (SS) or education (E). (A full list of the societies, URLs and the pricing models adopted is provided at the end of this article.) They ranged from societies self-publishing a single journal to societies with a well-established publishing wing to societies publishing in partnership with not-for-profit or commercial publishers. The list was dominated by science societies (about 80%), more than half of which belonged to the biomedical sciences. I found only 17 societies publishing online journals in the social sciences, humanities and education. These societies were somewhat more likely to publish electronic-only journals; however about 33% of their journals were electronic-only, compared to only 20% of the surveyed science journals.

Most societies adopted a single pricing model, although some multi-journal societies used more than one model. Societies publishing both print and electronic editions offered a wide array of models, although the most popular, by far, was to bundle electronic access with subscription to the print edition (model 2). Approx-

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The De-Commercialisation of Scientific Publishing — Some Thoughts Against the Grain

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NB: Please note that British spelling has been retained.—KS

Introduction

There are signs that the electronic era is beginning to cause a shift in traditional practices with journals such as *Living Reviews in Relativity*, an elegant electronic journal, available free of charge. There is also the database of **Paul Ginsparg** at Los Alamos, and there are new enterprises in purely electronic publishing, from people with academic backgrounds who are searching for a less costly means of scientific communication and others are searching for a more complete form of communication using the facilities now available. Librarians are finding that the records of library usage for science journals no longer reflect the use and importance of an individual journal title, as access made directly via the Internet is without a library record. It is also true that some librarians are finding the changes difficult to accommodate. There have been expressions of distaste about the new electronic publishers using electronic means for publicising their journals, also distaste for CD-ROMs as archive material.

There is a growing recognition by libraries both in Europe and the USA that the commercialisation of science journal publishing is affecting the freedom of the system of communication which is using, increasingly,

distribution through the Internet, but the opposite idea that the Internet should make available everything and anything for publication simply makes a great turbid sea, hardly a limpid pool. Scientific and editorial standards would have to be maintained in any alternative. The refereed article is an essential part of searching if time is not to be wasted looking through literally hundreds of papers which have no guarantee of basic quality.

The importance of refereeing

Refereeing has always been a requirement of recognised scientific communication and such work is usually performed by academics free of charge. There is here an area of donated costs, by academics, which disappears within the costing procedures of commercial publishing, and which, if identified at source, could make a direct contribution to costs. Authors could prepare typeset text with modern Desktop Publishing systems (DTP) and, with some assistance, could prepare files for the Web site. There is, in this, the possibility of a movement away from traditional practice and towards academic control over the processes of production.

So, are we seeing a reversion to the eighteenth century, with science publishing by the individual within the learned community? If so, what would be the effects of such a change, on standards of editing and refereeing, on presentation and access, and on archiving? In the

eighteenth century a paper was read to one's peers and held in the society's archive for reference. Wider publication followed, of necessity for access at a distance, but was limited by the technology



Traditional versus Internet publishing

Ink on paper presentation has special production needs—ink, paper, machining, postage, storage, marketing—all expensive items, marketing in particular, as this is an open-ended need. How much marketing is needed to obtain a circulation capable of reducing the selling price of a journal? By contrast putting material directly onto the Internet is relatively cheap: a CD-ROM for archive, costs about ten dollars to produce.

At present we go from distributed author/reader to centralised publishing services, decentralised again to author/reader. It would be possible, with Internet, to go from distributed author/reader to centralised access by author/reader, but it would take an enormous change in traditional practices to achieve.

The ink on paper journal has several demands made of it. It is the database, in that all papers have to be there despite the need for access to any given paper. It is the file

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mately 10% of societies in this group sold the print edition by subscription, but allowed free access to the electronic edition (model 1). Another 27% provided institutional subscribers with some kind of option (models 5 to 9). The second most popular pricing model overall was the freely accessible, electronic-only journal (model 10). Only a few societies (all in the sciences) charged for access to their electronic-only journals (models 11 and 12). Two societies, both in the biomedical sciences, restricted access to the electronic edition to their members (model 13).


The overall picture combines standardization with continuing experimentation. Most scholarly and professional societies continue to publish in print, providing access to the electronic edition as added value for institutions or, occasionally, for members only. Nev-

ertheless, a significant number of societies are trying alternative pricing models that give institutions more options for purchasing online access in addition to, or instead of, the print edition. Societies publishing electronic-

only journals show a marked reluctance to charge subscription fees for access: most of the electronic-only journals in this survey were supported financially by author fees, society contributions and/or volunteer labor. While 1998 saw the introduction of many of the online journals, especially the electronic-only journals, included in this survey, the explosion of freely accessible, so-

ciety-sponsored online scholarly journals promised by some pundits has not yet occurred. I believe that 1999 will continue to see scholarly societies making inroads in the online publishing world; the further develop-

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ment of electronic-only journals will depend primarily upon the acceptance by scholars of the journals that now exist, and also upon the success of the financial mechanisms used to support them. I also anticipate that the current broad range of pricing models will start to be replaced by a few dominant models, as libraries continue to express their pricing preferences to societies and publishers. 

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