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# Something to Think About -- Is the Print Journal Dying?

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# Something to Think About — Is the Print Journal Dying?

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In being able to manage serials, we must understand the other alternatives of acquisitions. We are a small academic university with a major specialty in Aeronautical and Aerospace Sciences. Many of our specialty journals are not indexed by large vendor products, such as **ProQuest**, **OmniFile**, or **JSTOR**. We retain these databases to allow us access to many periodicals we cannot afford to purchase in print. We are about to go into negotiations with **LexiNexis** and are considering other packages, but there will always be some titles we will have to purchase in print form. We are beginning to examine the **EBSCO** titles at this time to determine how many we buy in print only or print/online combinations. We will be changing to the combination package as often as funds allow. This is the first step in a transition to the all e-journal package.

Are print journals, as a format, dying? The evidence doesn't show this to be true. In the 1980's and 1990's, it was predicted that the print form for journals would perish within ten to twenty years. Not only has it not died, but it seems to be making a comeback.

To understand the process, we need only look at the change process, human nature, and technology. Man does not like change for the most part. Change happens slowly and cautiously. Technology jumps ahead, then settles down to fixing the problems, then soars again.



It is this "see-saw effect" that explains the continuance of the print format of journals. Print publishers understand that by offering combinations of print/online access, they are helping to extend their lives in print form. People do not accept the electronic versions without reservations. There are some basic problems to acceptance: credibility, archiving, indexing, and accessibility.

What we are beginning to see are heightened microprocessing speeds, more indexing, more titles being captured in electronic form, and a print format that is starting to look more and more like the electronic journals, as it begins to offer packages. This year, the British scholastic community has begun to accept some e-journals as valid publishing places for scholarly articles, while American universities are slower to accept this new publishing form. In addition, some electronic journals have begun to market themselves as peer reviewed publishing sources. The sides are all getting closer together, but still some distance apart. This process of compromise is slow, as all change is, but it is moving in the same direction. Still there will always be pockets of journal

publishing that will remain in print for a long time. Organizations that have small focused or eclectic readerships will probably remain. Small press or "home" presses

will continue to service their memberships with print journals and proceedings.

There is also another thing to consider. Many people do not have access to home computers or electronic reading devices. Consider third world countries and even our own world is not totally populated with computers or those who are adept at using them. It reminds me of the Middle Ages when a small group of people were adept at reading and they kept the world's information cloistered in monasteries. We keep going in and out of that world where those that have — have all and those that don't have nothing! I'm not sure I want to revisit our history on that issue. I spent too many years dependent upon Public Libraries and Schools affording me the right to have access to information. I'm not ready to have that right usurped by the few and rich. Online/electronic information is wonderful, but there are times when I feel pressured to sign for them and I understand that there are no guarantees for perpetual ownership. If the company decides to drop the title, you own nothing and your patrons have nothing to rely on save ILL. I guess ILL depends a lot on those that actually own the print material for loans. This is becoming a very precarious world of information. Some day we may find that everyone has forgone the right to own the physical material for the various bits and bytes of electronic light that represented it and so it vanishes. Is that something to think about? 🐼

## As I See It! — Fewer And Larger: The Process Of Consolidation Continues

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We have almost become used to the succession of small and medium-sized companies finding their way into the haven of the big commercial publishing groups. Ten years ago, the scholarly publishing industry resounded with the names of independent publishers: **CRC Press**, **Lawrence Erlbaum Associates**, **Humana Press**, **Carfax**, **Frank Cass**, **Swets & Zeitlinger**, **Marcel Dekker**, and many more. They have all disappeared as the financial and operational burden of remaining competitive and up-to-date in the online age finally eclipsed the joys of independence.

The pace of consolidation has not slackened. In the past two months, **Springer's** private equity owners, **Cinven** and **Candover**,

approached **Informa**, the UK company of which **Taylor & Francis** is a part. They tabled a bid which was swiftly rejected by **Informa**.

Then **Wiley** announced that it was to buy **Blackwell Publishing** for over \$1 billion. The combined company will publish 1,250 journals and a wide-ranging and substantial book program. So **Wiley** has leapt into second place, behind **Elsevier** as the largest scientific publisher. **Wolters Kluwer Health**, **Springer** and **Taylor & Francis** rank next in size. Five companies dominate scholarly and scientific publishing.

Is that the end, or will we see further changes to the landscape of scholarly publishing? It is possible that **Springer** and **Informa** will re-

sume their courtship. The attraction of marrying publishing with conference management in science and medicine is a powerful aphrodisiac. Meanwhile, all five of those companies will be looking to buy smaller companies and secure publishing rights to society journals.

There are some more fundamental forces at play. Printed publishing was always a craft-based cottage industry. It did not require significant capital investment. The ability to spot trends, provide authors and editors with first rate personal service, and publish content that met the needs of scholarship and scientific research provided success. But that is only

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