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Innovations Affecting Us — Electronic-Only Format for New Journal Publication: A Medium for Innovation

by **Kristen DeVoe** (Electronic Resources Librarian, College of Charleston) <devoek@cofc.edu>

Advances in the management, generation, and distribution of scholarly information have allowed for the publication of journals in an electronic-only format, with no associated print counterpart. For smaller publishers electronic-only can be a more viable option than print or print plus electronic for new publications because of the lower cost in terms of article productions and the ability to quickly reach a wide audience. Some new journals have found that this format offers unique opportunities for innovation with regard to the functionality and editorial structure of the journal that could not be as easily accomplished with a print journal or an electronic journal that serves as an online version of a print publication.

Despite the opportunities that electronic-only journals have, through the use of technology and the Internet as a publishing medium, to make a successful impact in their intended fields many have failed. It can be difficult for electronic-only journals to develop the credibility and authority that is necessary for success. The peer review process, lack of an established paper equivalent, faculty tenure requirements, and the journal impact factor have all been obstacles for online-only journals since they began to emerge. To build credibility, these publications must balance themselves between the traditional (and accepted) features of printed scholarly communication such as rigorous peer review and inclusion in abstracting and indexing resources and the innovative features available to them as digital publications. By paying spe-

cific attention to the use of the Internet as a publication medium to offer scholars an inventive yet authoritative means of scholarly communication, some electronic-only journals have the opportunity to utilize new technologies and inventive editorial organizations to achieve success.

E-only: Reaching a Wider Audience

In the 1990s, as they began to create electronic versions of print publications, publishers were able to put scholarly articles before a wider audience than ever before and offer unique features such as hyperlinking and enhanced searching. Publishers of new journals that are “born digital” (electronic-only since their inception) are able to take these capabilities even further because there are no ties to an existing, traditional, print publication. For that reason, they can produce completely new vehicles for sharing scholarly information rather than create a print publication with an online version. Utilizing a digital only format for publication, quality, refereed articles can be published online at a faster pace, sometimes within days of their submission, and new editorial structures for scholarly journals can be put in place to reflect the wide reaching potential of the electronic environment.



In many cases, especially with the sciences, print journals are often niche publications that do not readily facilitate cross-disciplinary research. With the introduction of electronic versions of print journals, scholars are able to search across multiple journals through the use of aggregators that

provide access to a number of titles. As research in many fields becomes more interdisciplinary, some electronic-only journals have undertaken publication processes that better reflect this growing movement. Whereas with print and electronic versions of print journals, a scholar submits an article to one publication with a specific scholarly focus, an electronic-only journal can incorporate many disciplines and serve as one broad based publication that supports both subject specific and cross-disciplinary research.

Two examples of journals that have implemented unconventional editorial practices with success are **TheScientificWorldJOURNAL** (<http://www.thescientificworldjournal.com>) and **The Journal of Digital Information** (<http://jodi.tamu.edu>). Both of these publications use a “journal within a journal” editorial structure as a means to manage and amalgamate papers within a broad scope. **TheScientificWorld JOURNAL** uses an overlapping “domain” based structure to organize accepted articles. Each domain is focused on a specific scientific discipline, approach or community and essentially functions as an individual journal, with its own editorial organization and structure. Similarly, the **Journal of Digital Information** has a theme based structure where each theme has its own editor, but themes are linked to facilitate the retrieval of relevant information. In each of these publications, a researcher can search within a subject area of interest, or can search the entire publication which includes multiple subject areas. This structure allows for both narrow and cross-disciplinary research and makes use of a digital format to do so. When viewing an article in one subject area, researchers can see what related fields that article has been placed in and access other information in those fields with the click of a mouse instead of having to search across multiple publications. Likewise, the cross-publishing of the same article across multiple subjects within the same publication ensures that a researcher looking in one particular field may find articles related to his or her research from across many subject areas that they may not have considered before. As this interdisciplinary publishing approach supports the interests of a scholar executing a search, it also supports the interests of the scholar submitting an article for publication because it helps to ensure that their research will reach a wide, interdisciplinary audience.


In a somewhat similar vein, the **American Institute of Physics (AIP)** and the **American Physical Society (APS)** have created a series called **Virtual Journals in Science in Technology** (<http://www.virtualjournals.org/>). These virtual journals also make use of the digital medium to encompass a broad subject range, but do so by presenting each virtual journal as a collection of online papers from existing “source” journals. While these are not born digi-

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to fully support the transition to digital. Developing the infrastructure has generated collaborations among several departments on campus. The **VRC** staff not only worked with the library who spearheaded the effort to acquire **ARTstor**, but also with the **Educational Technology Services (ETS)** unit to upgrade many of the classrooms with much needed digital projectors and provide training with the new equipment. The Learning Systems group of **ETS** is also working on developing an image gallery tool that will allow the integration of faculty personal digital collections into the Sakai-compliant **bSpace** course management software. The **Museum Informatics Program (MIP)** on campus developed an on-line searchable database for the **VRC**'s collection of digital images. The biggest challenge yet, however, is for **ETS** to develop the ability to conduct cross-collection searches across these varied resources such

as **ARTstor**, the History of Art **VRC** collection, and faculty personal collection. **ETS** is exploring the possibility of facilitating these “federated” searches by which to search these multiple collections from one interface.

The lessons learned from the acquisition of **ARTstor** at **UC Berkeley** are invaluable. We found that faculty and students are interested and ready to use this new digital technology in a variety of ways, whether it's on the advanced level of showing images in the classroom via the **Offline Image Viewer**, or just browsing the database for images. Several campus units made history by working together to ensure that this purchase would go forward. **ARTstor** staff and numerous professionals in units across campus (**Visual Resources Collection**, Art History/Classics Library, Educational Technology Services) cooperated to ensure that all interested faculty were trained. This teamwork and collaboration was the key to successfully integrating **ARTstor** into the scholarly community at the **University of California Berkeley**. 

tal publications because the content is culled from other sources, namely AIP and APS publications, they do attempt to utilize the electronic format of the journal to offer cross-disciplinary research that maintains an assurance of quality.


Electronic-only journals can also make good use of the digital medium to facilitate the submission and publication of articles. There is often little time between the submission of an article by a scholar, and its publication and dissemination in the online journal. An editorial organization based on relevant, narrower, subjects further enhances this process because authors can submit the article to the editors of the subject(s) relevant to their research for peer review. After peer review by the subject editors, the article can be passed on for further review or in some cases published in the appropriate subject area(s) before being placed in related areas.

Improvement in Functionality

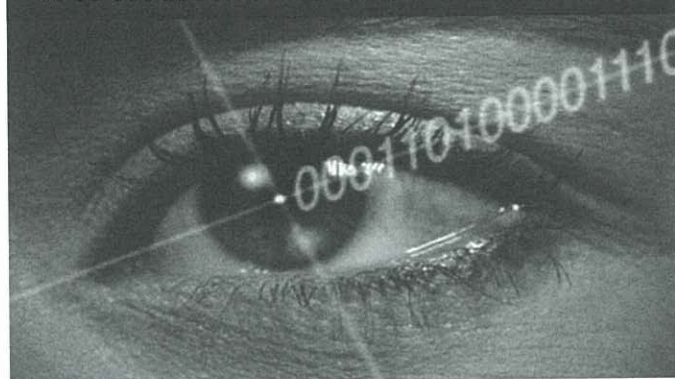
As journals in an electronic-only format can utilize the Internet as a medium to publish articles quickly and across many subject areas, they also have the opportunity to present unique features in functionality that print (and often their electronic versions) journals can or do not offer. One popular example of this increase in functionality is the incorporation of multimedia such as sound and video into a scholarly article. Journals such as the **American Communication Journal** (<http://www.acjournal.org/>), **The Journal of Seventeenth Century Music** (<http://sscm-jscm.press.uiuc.edu/jscm/>), **New Journal of Physics** (<http://www.iop.org/EJ/njp>), **Sociological Research Online** (<http://www.socresonline.org.uk/home.html>) and others support such multimedia enhancements to supplement published articles.

Some electronic-only journals have further explored the use of technology and the interactive nature of the Web as a means to enhance scholarly communication. For example, **TheScientificWorldJOURNAL** offers features that make use of "next generation" Web technologies such as blogging and keyword tagging to provide a more collaborative scholarly experience. Using a feature such as article blogging users can leave a comment on a particular article, as they can on a blog posting, for others to review and respond to. A feature like this strives to enhance scholarly communication and takes advantage of the Web to quickly share information and ideas by encouraging interaction among readers.

The Web today provides a rich environment for users, and part of that includes the personalization of information seeking. An electronic format for journals also allows publishers to offer a range of personalization features that provide the ability to customize the user interface, the information channels and the services provided based on the individual user's needs, interests and preferences. As just one example of these features, **The Institute of Physics** electronic journals (including the e-only and the electronic versions of print) have utilized a range of personalization options such as the "filing cabinet," a feature that allows users to keep an online record of articles that they have marked as interesting so that they can quickly be returned. Features such as "saved searches" and "favorite journals" also make use of popular features of many commercial Websites to improve the user experience. The recently revived **Journal of Electronic Publishing** (<http://www.press.umich.edu/jep/>) and many others offer a searchable book bag where users can save articles to be searched and retrieved later.

While electronic-only journals have the ability to offer unique features that strive to improve scholarly communication and access to scholarly information, many users and libraries are still more comfortable with the authority and familiarity of printed publications. Electronic publications certainly have the same responsibilities as printed ones in terms of offering relevant information that meets a high standard for academic quality, but they can also expand their capabilities by using the digital publication medium to improve the user experience and widely disseminate the information within. The publications and features described above offer an example of how an electronic-only format can serve as a viable publishing medium for new journals. 

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