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Journal Article Versioning is Harder than it Looks...or Should Be!

by **Lettie Conrad** (Online Product Manager, SAGE Publications, Inc.) <lettie.conrad@sagepub.com>

The concept of a “version of record” may be an artifact from the days when publishing relied on printed distribution. Yet, in an age of reliance upon digital journal publishing practices, the notion of an unvarying record of scholarly discourse remains valuable to academic researchers and librarians.

Debates continue to stir within our industry, however, on how to overhaul or maintain versioning practices in online journals. There are a number of options for applying metadata to an online article to indicate version status, but there is no clear winner, as no option is yet in dominant use by publishers, libraries, and managers of institutional repositories worldwide. **ALPSP** and **NISO’s** Collections and Content Management committee joined forces to commission recommendations from a joint Journal Article Version Working Group (JAV) in 2008. Their proposed terms differ slightly from those in use by the **LSE** and also those employed by the **SHERPA/RoMEO Publisher** copyright policies. **CrossRef** has put considerable effort into development of **CrossMark**, <http://www.crossref.org/crossmark.html>, a new version management device set to launch this spring, which simply indicates currency of versions, without applying specific terminology.

In a 2010 **NISO** survey, intended to assess uptake and interest in the JAV metadata recommendations,¹ the majority of respondents indicated agreement that standard journal article version practices are important and necessary to maintain online. Participants were aware that any lack of version clarity causes significant problems for researchers in many disciplines.

However, among these participants, who serve various roles across our global industry, there was no consensus as to how this should be achieved and what type of version indicators should be standardized. Some noted concern that all options currently in use were not universally clear or useful to readers. A slight majority, 51%, indicated agreement with the

JAV’s suggested standards, while a notable portion, just below 29%, were not familiar with the recommended terms.

Regardless of the survey respondents’ perspectives of the JAV terms, when asked more generally if standard terms should be applied to journal article versions, the answer was a clear “Yes,” with 176 (92.1%) agreeing there should be, and only seven (3.7%) disagreeing. A full report of the findings of this survey can be found on **NISO’s** Website http://www.niso.org/apps/group_public/document.php?document_id=6013&wg_abbrev=ccm.

Despite the strong support of standard versioning practices, and lack of consensus in a common approach, many respondents indicated that they are neither willing nor able to prioritize a solution at this time. Only 20% of respondents indicated that their organization was planning to adopt a set of versioning terms or practices and a surprisingly large contingent of more than 63% responded that they had no intention of incorporating any versioning support.

Most agree, however, that publishers hold the key to breaking through this fog, as article version controls are an extension of the stewardship of the academic record. While this type of development often falls into publishers’ “nice-to-have” camp, publishers must respond to industry feedback on this pitfall of digital publishing. Researchers continually struggle with confusion caused by lack of consistency in determining an article’s status in the publication lifecycle. Librarians educate their patrons on citation practices for ahead-of-print articles, but cannot ensure scholars will follow up to ensure the most recent iteration is applied to research papers or projects. Publishers have a

unique leadership opportunity to support cutting-edge online research practices and raise the bar on article versioning practices.

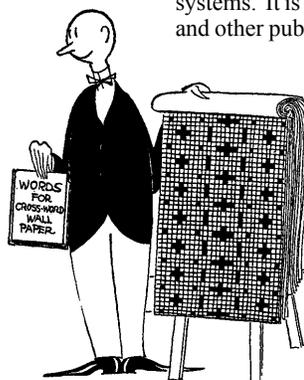
Heeding such industry feedback, **SAGE** launched development in 2010 to incorporate the JAV-recommended terms into article metadata on **SAGE Journals Online (SJO)**, hosted with **HighWire Press**. **SAGE** believes that with the technical capability to publicly release more than one instance of a manuscript and allow access to iterations throughout its lifecycle comes the obligation to clearly signify the status of each version.

In late 2010, **SAGE** was presented with an opportunity to expand our OnlineFirst (“ahead of print”) program to include accepted manuscripts as well as proof copies of articles. This project allowed for a key chance to improve version identifiers on **SJO**. Now that **SAGE** produces content using an XML-first workflow, the addition of these metadata is a relatively straightforward enhancement to our production systems. It is a project similar to others **SAGE** and other publishers have tackled over the last decade, one that requires infrastructural migration toward an equal focus on both print and online delivery channels.

The primary challenges in this development were not technical for **SAGE**. Instead, like many respondents to the **NISO** survey, the barriers we encountered were intellectual and cultural ones. We debated global industry standards, editorial concerns for author and researcher needs, legal quandaries about corrections policies, and budgetary pressures on our online development strategies.

The creation and distribution of reliable versions of record requires adoption of efficient

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What’s JAV Got to Do with It? from page 18

issue of versions, record information can provide valuable insight to researchers as they assess the credibility of the content they rely upon. Record information may include data like publication dates, funding sources, location of data deposits, licensing information, **CrossCheck** plagiarism screening status, and content type definitions. **CrossRef** will not specify which record information fields can be present, though we do anticipate and encourage communities of practice to develop among publishers in specific disciplines.

Giving readers choices about where to get their information and what versions to use is “a good thing.” A better thing is providing them with enough information to evaluate the source and quality of that content. Labeling versions of record through **CrossMark**, especially with standardized, meaningful terminology such as provided by JAV, is an approach to making it easy for researchers to find and use that important information.

For a more complete discussion of the problems with multiple online journal versions, please see the article in *Learned Publishing*.²

Endnotes

1. Journal Article Versions (JAV): Recommendations of the **NISO/ALPSP** JAV Technical Working Group, **NISO-RP-8-2008**, April 2008 <http://www.niso.org/publications/rp/RP-8-2008.pdf>, accessed 3/15/2011.
2. Meyer, C. “Distinguishing published scholarly content with **CrossMark**,” *Learned Publishing*, 24:87–93, 2011.

practices to release material of the highest possible quality, published within known patterns and bearing standard mechanisms of cataloging and archiving, such as ISSNs and DOIs. Journal article version metadata are now a facet of publishers' responsibilities in disseminating scholarly material online. And, while **SAGE** cannot satisfy every researcher and every member of its community, **SAGE** is taking a significant step toward an industry-wide solution for standard versioning practices.

The next major hurdle in the evolution of journal article versioning is industry acceptance of post-publication corrections and enhanced versions of record. Many recommended standards, such as **NISO's** JAV terms, incorporate support for any iterations following what was known in the print-only world as the "final" issue version or version of record.

However, many publishers either do not make any changes to the version of record or display non-standard indicators when such changes occur. **SAGE** is prepared to contribute to shared efforts toward clear and acceptable practices for iterations beyond the version of record. **SAGE** is prepared to launch another wave of production and platform enhancements to our journals publishing program that allow clear indications of changes to an article's version of record. We look forward to partnering with other members of the scholarly community to examine the conceptual and logistical implications of this change within to all aspects of our industry.

The 2010 **NISO** study supports this need for more discussion and awareness on these topics that will bring us closer to versioning standardization. Today, there exists a troubling disconnect between the needs of scholarly researchers and the obstacles encountered by those in publishing and dissemination roles. Further research of this sort is needed to expand

our collective understanding of the type of demands from scholarly readers and practitioners for article versioning standards. 🍄

Endnotes

1. The summer 2010 survey was conducted by **NISO** across representatives of key groups — repository managers, librarians, and journal publishers and editors — to learn more about their interest and engagement in journal article version terms and related practices. The objective was assessment of the scholarly community's investment in new routines to steward online article versions at every stage of public distribution. Specifically, the focus was on the uptake of terminology recommended by the **NISO/ALPSP** Journal Article Versions (JAV) Technical Working Group, www.niso.org/publications/rp/RP-8-2008.pdf, in 2008. This recommended practice is managed by the **NISO** Content and Collection Management (CCM) Topic Committee.

Open Access Self-Archiving of Refereed Research: A Post-Gutenberg Compromise

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If asked what would be ideal for their research access needs, most scientific and scholarly researchers would say that they would wish to have access to every piece of research relevant to their own work, rigorously peer-reviewed, conscientiously copyedited, and elegantly formatted, online and on paper, as soon as it is ready for publication. (In some fields — e.g., high-energy physics — researchers also want access to research *before* it is peer-reviewed, but so far this is the exception rather than the rule.) Moreover, because in most fields the research users and the research authors are the same population, wearing different hats, what is ideal for the user is also ideal for the author: researchers conduct and publish research so it can be accessed, used, applied, and built upon by other researchers in further ongoing research. The progress and funding of their scholarly work — not to mention their careers and salaries — depend on the uptake and impact of their research findings. Hence the broader and earlier the access to their findings, the better for authors (**Gargouri et al. 2010**).

So much for ideals. Now, what is the reality? There are about 25,000 peer-reviewed scholarly and scientific journals, across all disciplines, nations, and languages, publishing about 2.5 million articles per year. No university or research institution in the world can afford to subscribe to all, most, or even many of those 25,000 journals; most can only afford to subscribe to a small fraction of them. That means that most researchers worldwide only have access to a small fraction of the

research published annually; it also means that the authors of all those annual articles only have access to a fraction of their potential users worldwide. Access, usage, impact, and research progress are being lost, annually, because access falls short of being universal.

A solution has existed ever since the onset of the Post-Gutenberg (online) era (**Oker-son and O'Donnell 1995**). The solution is known, and it is (belatedly) beginning to be implemented: authors can make their peer-reviewed research accessible free for all online by self-archiving their peer-reviewed final drafts in their institutional repository immediately upon acceptance for publication, and their institutions and funders can mandate such self-archiving (**Harnad et al. 2003**). The author's self-archived final draft is not the publisher's version of record — it is peer-reviewed, but it is not copyedited nor in the publisher's final format. So the solution is a compromise; but it is a compromise that is incomparably better than the status quo. It means that refereed research findings are immediately available to all potential users, not just to the fraction that are at subscribing institutions. The published version's formatting is of no importance to the many would-be users who would otherwise have no access at all; and if the copyediting (which for most journals

these days is exceedingly light¹) has corrected anything substantive, the author can update the final draft to incorporate that too.

Author self-archiving is called "Green Open Access" (Green OA). The majority of journals today (and almost all the top journals) have already given their official green light to immediate author self-archiving of their final drafts. For the minority of articles published in the journals that do not yet endorse Green OA, the final draft can and should be deposited in the author's institutional repository immediately upon acceptance for publication in any case. If the author wishes to observe a journal's embargo on OA, access to the deposit can be set as "Closed Access" rather than "Open Access" during the embargo. The bibliographic metadata (author, title, journal, abstract, etc.) of Closed Access deposits are immediately visible to all, webwide, and the institutional repositories can implement an "eprint request" button that allows would-be users to request and authors to provide a single copy for research purposes (**Sale et al. 2010**). This too is a compromise: it is not OA; it is Almost-OA.

But universal Green OA self-archiving mandates, adopted by universities, research institutions, and research funders worldwide

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