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People Profile: Deborah Kahn

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of Nottingham published one of the very first electronic journals), it seemed clear that researchers would embrace the new technology to help them to collaborate and share their results more efficiently. I expected that the whole paradigm of publishing would change rapidly, and that the peer review and dissemination would be covered by research grants and that results would be made freely accessible. This is now happening and is called open-access publishing. It is just that the change has taken a decade or two longer to actually come about than I expected.

ATG: *What trends are emerging in open-access journal publishing?*

DK: Open-access publishing is basically a growing subset of STM publishing, so it is subject to the same trends. Researchers are being pressurized to publish more and more. This leads to a pressure on peer reviewers and on Editors, who need to continue to apply the same high standards of peer review to an increasing number of incoming submissions. It also puts pressure on subscription journals who are having to reject papers that they would never have done in the past, because of page budgets, and these papers are now being channeled to open-access journals, which do not have the same limits on space. This has been the motivation for the launch over the last 12 months of *Scientific Reports* from **Nature Publishing Group**, *BMJ Open*, *G3* from the **Genetics Society of America**, *Open Biology* from the **Royal Society**, and many similar journals.

At the same time research budgets in Europe and North America are being cut, while those in the emerging markets are increasing rapidly — with the output of high-quality scientific papers from countries such as China, Brazil, and India growing extremely rapidly. So the demographics of the authors are changing, and they have different needs which we need to cater for.

The other major trend is the move towards Open Data — to quote a recent blog on our site from **Alex Wade of Microsoft**: “scholarly communication can and should evolve from static and disparate data and knowledge representation, as embodied in today’s typical PDF representations of research papers, to a rich integrated content which grows and changes the more we learn.” **BioMed Central** is again leading the field in this regard.

ATG: *What has been the impact of Springer’s purchase of BioMed Central on the attitudes and business plans of BioMed Central?*

DK: It is the difference between being a start-up company owned by an individual and being part of a large international business. **Springer** is interested in the long-term future of the business so has invested substantially in **BioMed Central** and allowed us to take a longer-term strategic outlook. **Springer’s** infrastructure is really helping us to realize our potential for growth. For example, **Springer’s** global network of offices allows us to have staff in key locations, such as China and the U.S., as

against the grain people profile

Deborah Kahn

Publishing Director, BioMed Central
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BORN AND LIVED: Born in Manchester, lived in Manchester, London, Utrecht, Amsterdam and Oxford.

EARLY LIFE: My parents (a Professor of theoretical astrophysics and a Mathematics teacher) encouraged me to be curious and question everything. Has got me into hot water from time to time.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: STM publisher through and through. Started in book and journal production, moved into acquisitions and journal management. Ten years with the **Thomson Corporation** learning to be an electronic publisher. Tried to leave the industry and become a psychotherapist, but STM publishing pulled me back, when I found my dream job (this one!).

IN MY SPARE TIME: If I had some, I would spend more time with my partner and dog, play the piano, walk in the mountains, go to the gym, sing in a choir, read more books, cook gourmet food.

FAVORITE BOOKS: *The Bone People*, *A Fine Balance*, *The Blind Assassin*.

PET PEEVES: People who don’t question things.

MOST MEMORABLE CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: That’s for others to assess.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: Still to be enjoying my job as much as I am now.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: I am continually surprised by the glacial speed of change within the academic publishing. Really nothing much has changed in 300 years. Granted, electronic communications make everything happen much faster, and electronic access makes journals much more accessible, but the article PDF still looks much like the printed article did when journals were invented, the peer-review system functions in much the same way, subscription journals still make up 90% of the market. So much the same I imagine. 🐢

well as to continue to develop our services and tools for our library customers, our editors, societies, authors, and reviewers whilst managing the spectacular growth in submissions.

ATG: *Tell us about SpringerOpen and its impact on BioMed Central. Is this a game changer?*

DK: **SpringerOpen** completes the open-access publishing package from **Springer**, giving authors the chance to publish in a high-quality, open-access journal, whatever their scientific discipline. It is “powered by” **BioMed Central** — that is, it uses all of our systems and processes but also benefits from the powerful **Springer** branding in the areas where **Springer** is a leading force. Since its launch less than a year ago, **SpringerOpen** has announced nearly 50 titles in mathematics, engineering, information sciences, chemistry, and other non-biomedical fields, and is proving to be a significant force in the open-access publishing field.

ATG: *You are a mathematician by training. Has OA journal been successful mathematically? How would you define success in this case?*

DK: According to **Wikipedia**, “mathematicians formulate new conjectures and resolve the truth or falsity of them by proofs which are sufficient to convince others of their validity.” When **Vitek Tracz** and **Matt Cockerill** started **BioMed**

Central in 2000, they believed that there was a new publishing model that could work in journal publishing which would allow open access to research in a sustainable way. This has now been proven without doubt. So, yes, OA publishing has been successful mathematically.

ATG: *What does growing OA publishing mean for small publishers? Is OA their salvation or ruin? Why or why not?*

DK: Well, **BioMed Central** was only launched 11 years ago, and until recently could have been designated a small publisher. Now, with nearly 300 staff and publishing 215 journals, we are probably medium-sized. So, as far as this small publisher is concerned, OA has been a good thing! In business, whatever size business you are, you need to be able to meet the needs of your customers. If you do, you thrive. If not, you fail. The same is true for small publishers. If customers want OA and they are not in a position to provide it, they will fail.

ATG: *To finish on a personal note, tell us about yourself. What do you do in your spare time? What do you like to read?*

DK: I love to spend time with my partner and dog walking in the country. I love to travel and am looking forward to my summer holiday walking in the hills in Southern Spain. I love to read, listen to music, go to the theatre, and eat great food. 🐶