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Don's Conference Notes: How Academic Social Network Platforms Such as Mendeley Make Researchers' Lives Easier: A Discussion with Jan Reichelt

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How Academic Social Network Platforms Such as Mendeley Make Researchers' Lives Easier: A Discussion with Jan Reichelt

As part of its Masters in Publishing series of educational events, the **Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers (ALPSP)**, <http://www.alpso.org>, in cooperation with the **Copyright Clearance Center (CCC)**, <http://www.copyright.com>, conducted a Webinar featuring **Jan Reichelt**, Co-Founder and President of **Mendeley**, on May 14, 2014. ALPSP's series "spotlights industry leaders in publishing whose innovations are charting new courses and whose successes are built on both taking and managing risk."

Reichelt began by reviewing the recent history of **Mendeley**, and then devoted the majority of his presentation to a discussion of **Elsevier's** recent acquisition of **Mendeley**, highlighting its effects on publishers and users. When the acquisition was announced, concerns were raised by a number of publishers who were working with **Mendeley**, as well as by some of its users. There was even an article in *The New Yorker* discussing the impact of the transaction ("When the Rebel Alliance Sells Out," April 12, 2013, <http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/elements/2013/04/elsevier-mendeley-journals-science-software.html>), which reported that several prominent **Mendeley** users said that they did not trust **Elsevier** and would be closing their **Mendeley** accounts. But **Mendeley** executives scrutinized the deal and its opportunities very closely, concluding that they would be able to continue demonstrating more value to users, while being able to grow the service significantly because of an infusion of funding from **Elsevier's** deep pockets and connection to internal assets. In the end, only about 30 people closed their accounts, but **Mendeley** received 3,000 new users who saw the transaction as an indication that the service would be available for the long-term.

Mendeley's vision is to focus on building a global collaboration network for researchers. Indeed, **Reichelt** said, the service originally grew out of frustrations that he and his co-founders had with a lack of tools to foster collaboration by researchers. The aim of the service is therefore to continuously increase users' interaction with content.

Mendeley has two products:

- Its end-user service provides capabilities to increase productivity by permitting researchers to store, organize, and annotate references in their personal collections, and to collaborate by networking with others having similar research interests. (**Reichelt** noted that collaboration is an important part of research activity.) Data collected anonymously on users' behavior in interacting with their collections is used by the system to provide statistics on publication

impacts and personalized recommendations to researchers on related relevant publications. **Mendeley** is a strong supporter of the recently popular altmetrics movement.

- Following requests by librarians at several academic institutions, the "Mendeley Institutional Edition" was created to allow librarians and others to see the patterns of content usage across an entire institution. One issue that arose after its introduction was a concern by publishers regarding copyright issues, but after much discussion, the viewpoint of **Mendeley** executives was that article sharing by researchers is a natural part of their collaborative activities, and that **Mendeley** would seek arrangements with publishers to permit it.

Mendeley's data aggregation model leverages existing social activity to build a discovery engine that groups researchers' stored

content by topic, popular articles, tags, and active users. It also provides a recommendation engine which anonymously compares a users' reading list with that of others and presents the user with a list of non-overlapping articles, thus suggesting other potentially unknown but relevant content to the user, however without providing full-text access to this content.

The **Mendeley** research network currently has about three million users from major universities around the world, such as the **University of Cambridge**, **University of Oxford**, **Stanford**, **MIT**, and **Harvard**. Looking at the state of the industry as a whole, **Reichelt** said that publishers provide much of the valuable content and associated metadata to the academic community via their publishing activities, but the "social layer" of research has not been widely addressed, an area in which **Mendeley** aims to play a leading role. He wondered what would happen in the publishing industry if the social layer were to become a major driver of how researchers discover and interact with content, which has happened in other industries, resulting in new content products being created, and that the industry should jointly discuss ways to understand and react to this trend.

Turning to a discussion of **Mendeley's** relationship with **Elsevier**, **Reichelt** noted that before the acquisition, it was a small company

with limited resources, but it now has access to increased funding, knowledge assets, and existing relationships with publishers and customers. **Mendeley's** services have been integrated with some of **Elsevier's** existing and similarly publisher-neutral products; for example, a "Save to **Mendeley**" button has been added to Scopus results screens. **Reichelt** was careful to note, however, that **Mendeley's** existing relationships with other publishers will continue to be supported and expanded, and extensive efforts have been made to ensure that their proprietary data will be protected. He said that **Mendeley** has taken steps to becoming a publisher-friendly scientific social network and hence an alternative to Dropbox or email, by reporting insights into user behavior, and delivering **COUNTER**-compliant reporting to support publishers' sales and marketing activities. Researcher behavior is a key concept for **Mendeley**, which continues to look at the entire research process.

Reichelt concluded that combining content and data with technology is incredibly powerful, and that the **Mendeley-Elsevier** transaction has created an additional publisher-neutral platform and hence a model of how



Jan Reichelt, Co-Founder and President of Mendeley.

digital publishers can survive and prosper in today's digital environment. He acknowledged that the integration has had its painful moments, which have taken time to resolve, but it also has provided significant benefits, including creating more exposure for and engagement with publisher content, and building a global researcher collaboration network, while being respectful of copyright and supporting the publishing industry.

In the question period, a number of interesting issues were raised by Webinar attendees. They are shown here, along with **Reichelt's** responses.

What Mendeley data is shared with Elsevier?

JR: We share how many users we have, and the results of agreed experimental trials, e.g., PDF previews and their positive impact on user and content engagement.

We do not share usage information from different publishers or other competitively sensitive information.

How do CCC licenses work with Mendeley?

JR: Via **Elsevier's** legal team, **Mendeley** collaborates with CCC, CLA, etc. on questions that arise.

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Are there any key trends among users in different areas of the world?

JR: There are few differences between regions; problems tend to be the same everywhere. Usage patterns are the same. The more that users can do online, the more they appreciate the product.

What other publishers have been partnered with and what do those partnerships look like?

JR: With the first publishers we have amended their Scopus agreement, so **Mendeley** can use such data to provide better reporting to publishers, and we are seeking more agreements with additional publishers.

What is the future of academic social networking?

JR: It is easier for users if there are a few good companies in the market rather than a patchwork of many different ones with different policies, different capabilities, and different user groups. Eventually, the market will converge to a few good companies.

What would you do differently if you were starting over today? What are the most critical aspects of a platform?

JR: I would not underestimate the power of data, its part in how people interact, and how much insight we can gain from it. The easier we make it for people to interact with content, the more they will do it. I would push for ways that we can make more content available to more people.

What does sharing of datasets represent for Mendeley? Will this increase on the platform? Are there any related copyright issues?

JR: People are not generally using **Mendeley** to share datasets yet, but it is becoming an increasing activity. We have a team looking at how to deposit and manage datasets. We need to think about how to establish standards.

What are your institutional tools and what is your strategy of reaching the institutional market and increasing the use of Mendeley?

JR: Creation of the institutional product was initially an opportunistic decision as librarians began requesting institution-wide access to **Mendeley**. Then we were approached by Swets and developed the institutional product with them. Users are validated by an IP address, and we have added an institutional dashboard to display the access by readers at the institution. This is a way to drive more **Mendeley** users into the market and also a way for libraries to provide more services to their users.

Is advertising a revenue stream for Mendeley?

JR: It has been an area of interest but it is not currently a revenue stream, and does not appear to be one in the future. Now that we have funding from **Elsevier**, we probably will not need advertising revenues. We are far away from displaying any advertising on **Mendeley**. 🐼

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*He recently contributed a chapter to the book **Special Libraries: A Survival Guide (ABC-Clio, 2013)** and is the Editor of **Personal Archiving**, (**Information Today, 2013**). He holds a Ph.D. degree from the **University of California, Berkeley** and has worked in the online information industry for over 40 years.*

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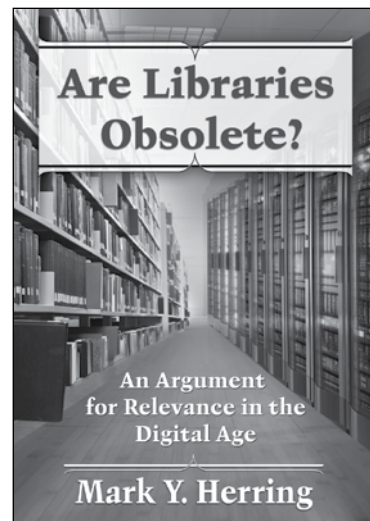
Individual Article Purchase: Catching the Wave of the Future or Getting Pounded on the Reef — Presented by **Doug Bates** (Tennessee Tech University)

Reported by: **Justin Davis** (SLIS Student, University of South Carolina)
<davisj59@email.sc.edu>

This presentation explained an alternative to maintaining expensive journal subscriptions at an academic library. **Bates** very methodically presented the reasons and chronological details of his library's transition to an individual article purchase model using Get it Now. The reasons for the shift were well explained, as were the pros and cons to various solutions to the problem of rising journal subscriptions. **Bates** included numerous tips and information as to how he communicated with concerned administrators and faculty members during the process. A downside to the presentation was that, as of the conference presentation, only about two months had passed since the individual article purchase model was implemented at **Tennessee Tech University**. This left only inconclusive details as to its overall success.

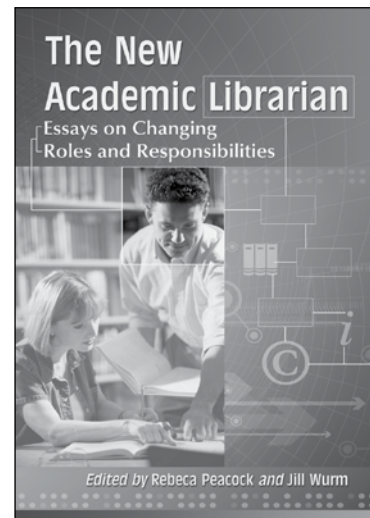
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