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ATG Interviews Eric Archambault, CEO, 1science

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ATG Interviews Dr. Eric Archambault

CEO, Iscience

by **Tom Gilson** (Associate Editor, *Against the Grain*) <gilson@cofc.edu>

and **Katina Strauch** (Editor, *Against the Grain*) <kstrauch@comcast.net>

ATG: *Eric, how did you get involved in open access scholarly publishing? Where did the idea for Iscience come from? Is there any significance to the name Iscience?*

EA: Our interest in OA dates back to about 2009, when we first thought of harvesting papers in repositories around the world. But it wasn't until 2012 that we seriously got involved in OA. That year, we started working on a contract for the European Commission with the aim of measuring the percentage of papers published in peer-reviewed journals available in OA. We got our first large-scale results in 2013 and saw that OA was moving fast. That same year, for a variety of reasons, we came to the conclusion that insuring a bright future for **Science-Metrix** (**Iscience's** mother company) involved investing in OA — that's when the decision was made to start the large-scale project that eventually saw the birth of **Iscience**.

As for the name, we saw **Iscience** as a unifying concept — one company serving all fields of academia, in all languages, from all over the world, all coherently appearing in one system. The founders of **Iscience** are French speakers and in French there isn't that huge divide we see in English where the humanities are not viewed as sciences: in French they are called *sciences humaines*. **Iscience** meant one platform for everything OA.

ATG: *Iscience claims to be comprehensive but it appears that your coverage is limited to peer-reviewed OA journals available via subscriptions. Is that correct?*

EA: You are right. We concentrate on papers published in peer-reviewed journals, but that said, we cover all green, hybrid and gold OA. We encompass green OA for papers published in subscription journals, but we also include papers published in freely available gold OA journals as well as so-called hybrid journals.

ATG: *Your initial product was the open access discovery platform oaFindr. But you now have two other products that complement oaFindr. Can you tell us about them?*

EA: Yes, you are right. Our initial product is a system centered on sophisticated software that facilitates the discovery of OA papers. While we were still heavily immersed in the development of that platform, we were told time and again by librarians that they were experiencing endless difficulties populating their institutional repositories (IR). After a while, we thought the index we were building to serve **oaFindr** could also help librarians rapidly populate their IR. Our vision was to transform the IR from a glorified local hard drive into a knowledge hub. The IR would not only contain physical versions of the pa-



pers archived by librarians and researchers, it would also point to papers written by a university's authors, wherever these papers could be found on the Internet.

We also heard very frequently that universities and other types of institutions needed high-quality analytics. That's how we ended up creating **oaFigr Subscription**, which examines how much journal subscriptions are used and shows that in some cases infrequently used journal and package subscriptions could be replaced at least in part by the gratis OA papers that are consolidated in **oaFindr**. **oaFigr Institution** examines the knowledge production of an institution, how impactful it is generally, whether OA increases that scientific impact or not, and the current shape of the institutional repository. This helps guide OA strategies in universities.

ATG: *Can you explain the process used in selecting OA journals to be included in Iscience? Who is responsible for that selection? Do publishers submit titles or are they actively selected by your professional staff?*

EA: The process is multifaceted and is mostly bottom up. We identify peer-reviewed papers and determine whether they can be downloaded in an unencumbered manner. Those that satisfy the criteria are then included in the **Iscience oaIdx**. We do not select material at the journal level, our unit is the article — but that said, gold journals are meant to be entirely included.

ATG: *What criteria do you apply when you select a journal to be included? Are both full and hybrid OA materials part of the mix?*

EA: For journals, we tend to privilege white lists; the DOAJ provides such a won-

derful instrument. Again though, our basic unit is the paper, so we do include papers published in hybrid journals and also green papers, which are gratis OA versions of papers frequently published in subscription-only journals. Note that green OA only means that the version of the paper we are talking about was archived by someone other than the publisher. So you can also have a green version of a gold paper.

ATG: *The best we can tell OA books are not included in Iscience. Are there plans to cover them in future?*

EA: What we have undertaken to do is huge in itself. We prefer to be leaders in OA journal articles than being "me-too" in several areas. That said, we are closely examining development in OA books and if we feel we can add value to that area in a unique manner and that we can muster the resources in a way that provides unique value to our clients, we will certainly consider including books. The same can be said of conference proceedings. In any case, we are not in a numbers game competition. We feel our clients deserve value and quality — they can already find the mish-mash on the Internet using **Bing** or **Google**.

ATG: *Can you tell us about the recent study you did regarding assessing the free availability of scholarly publications? How were you defining a scholarly publication?*

EA: This is the study I mentioned earlier that we conducted for the European Commission. In that study, we examined only articles published in scholarly journals. We used Scopus to draw a huge sample of more than one million papers and then we attempted to find them for free on the Internet. This is how we developed a sizeable portion of the knowledge base we are now refining at **Iscience**.

ATG: *According to the study what disciplines dominate the OA space? Which were lagging? Does Iscience coverage reflect this breakdown?*

EA: The OA space is dominated by the natural sciences, with the physics, mathematics, biology and biomedical research fields populated ahead of the rest. Chemistry drags a tad and so do the applied sciences. The social sciences are lagging behind these, whereas the arts and humanities are further lagging still. We hope to see a positive change in the arts and humanities in the next few years with the growth of gold OA journals around the world. Essentially, the **Iscience oaIdx** should converge with what is available out there as our aim is to be comprehensive.

ATG: *Pricing is a concern. Article processing charges (APCs) are currently the*

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primary method of paying for OA. Is that sustainable? From your vantage point what is that the most viable pricing model for the OA publications?

EA: My training is in science and technology policy, and questions of system-wide efficiency are always close to my heart. I am worried that flipping to OA is not going to be painless. The publishing industry has undergone a huge concentration in the last 35 years or so and I fear the transition to OA may accentuate this. The large publishers are offering innovative big deals that bundle APCs with subscriptions to paywalled journals, and these packages are highly seductive. The danger is that smaller publishers do not have the assets to make that kind of seductive offering. This could make the smaller publishers increasingly uncompetitive. Many smaller publishers who do not innovate will disappear together with their journals, or they will simply be absorbed by the larger publishers, thus furthering market concentration.

Coming back to the core of your question, the question is therefore not only one of being sustainable on the demand side but also on the supply side. There are a large number of publishers who offer APC-less gold publication

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There is also an on-demand Webex via Gale's robust training Website (as well as Webinars and other training support) here <http://solutions.cengage.com/gale-training/>.

ATG: *What can academic librarians expect from Gale products within the next two years? Within the next five years? What new services can we look forward to?*

LM: A key focus for Gale is to continue to identify ways we can take our content and technology from behind library walls and put it directly into student and instructor workflow.

Our customers can also certainly expect more digital archives with unique and rare content with global applicability. We're hoping to leverage our existing partnership with institutions in the Middle East and China to make that happen.

As we grow our archives program, look for more from Gale in the area of Digital Humanities. As I mentioned previously, we're exploring a sandbox type service to support this, in addition to our unique content and data.

Open Educational Resources (OER) continues to be hot trend in the academic space. Working with our Cengage colleagues, we're identifying ways institutions can leverage the

Gale content they've already paid for in the library to support these initiatives, and lower the cost of materials for students.

Lots of exciting things in the works!

ATG: *Obviously your responsibilities at Gale take up a tremendous amount of time but we were wondering what you do when you're not focused on the job? What personal interests do you have? What do you do for fun?*

LM: My husband and I have three children, two in college and one in high school, who serve as my real-life sounding board on how students learn today. I am a dog person, and we recently added a puppy to the family, bringing our dog count to two. I love to read, and I am really enjoying our wonderful public library, the **Baldwin Public Library** in Birmingham, MI.

ATG: *Liz, thank you so much for taking the time to chat with us.*

LM: Thank you for the opportunity to share pieces of the Gale world with your readers. Our team looks forward to connecting more at Charleston and other industry events. As always, any feedback can be directed to me at liz.mason@cengage.com. 🐾

and the question is, how can we support and help that model grow in a sustainable manner? At the top end of the market, I don't know how much competition there will be there in ten years considering the consolidation we are likely to see. Let's hope we continue to see regional players who can deliver high-quality value at a good price point as an alternative to the dominant firms who are likely to continue to increase their price.

I must admit that my main concern at the moment is the growing cleavage we might see between those who can publish in the best journals and get all the credit, and those who can't. There are big deals being negotiated that have an influence on author order and who becomes the corresponding author. We can progressively see the wealthiest countries extending their advantage by virtue of wealth rather than scholarly merit. This certainly warrants attention.

ATG: *Do you think that an OA model will be successful in displacing paid subscriptions? If so, where does that leave libraries? Where does it leave Iscience?*

EA: I certainly think so. Paid subscriptions to scholarly journals have become an aberration, as most of the research they publish is funded by public monies. This knowledge is meant to be public, there is no justification for locking it in. This has nothing to do with profits. I don't mind publishers earning a profit provided access to knowledge is not curtailed. Knowledge should be publicly owned, but it's only fair that value-added services receive commensurate income for the original value being created.

Iscience was created with a view to an open publishing world. We live in messy times, and our objective is to create order out of this chaos. That said, it is an uncomfortable position to be in. We see our role as bringing knowledge to users in an unencumbered manner, not as policeman. However, a lot of material on the web should not be presented in the way it is. Authors — and mea culpa, myself included — often post the final version of record of papers with the publishers' page layout. This creates a situation whereby a lot of papers on the web are infringing copyright because we want to post the version with the nice page layout. All progressive publishers accept that the post-print version — that is, the final accepted version without the page layout (and sometimes copy proofing work) — can be posted online: the most progressive do so without an embargo, the most conservative after an embargo period. The situation is therefore quite absurd, as in the end the infringement is essentially on page layout. I look forward to the day that **Iscience** doesn't have to contend with such a shallow problem, especially considering how huge the mission of creating an open access world is.

ATG: *Impact factor has been a standard tool used in evaluating journals. How does impact factor apply to the OA publishing? Or*

against the grain company profile

1science

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Phone: 1-800-860-6023 • 1science.com

AFFILIATED COMPANIES: Science-Metrix

KEY PRODUCTS AND SERVICES: oaFindr, oaFoldr and oaFigr.

CORE MARKETS/CLIENTELE: Academic libraries and universities.

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES: 10

HISTORY AND BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF YOUR COMPANY PROGRAM: **Iscience** is the leading provider of software tools and analytics to accelerate the transition to open access. The company's solution currently comprises three products. With **oaFindr**, library patrons can easily discover green, gold and hybrid open access scholarly articles published in peer-reviewed journals. **oaFoldr** continuously updates institutional repositories with open access papers produced by the institutions' authors, and published anywhere in the world. **oaFigr** presents bibliometric and open access indicators to support subscription management and strategic planning. **Iscience**, headquartered in Montreal, Canada, is affiliated with **Science-Metrix**, a leader in the bibliometrics and research evaluation community. 🌱

do you think altmetrics is sufficient alternative? If so, why?

EA: Impact factors have been grossly misunderstood. These are the instruments that have been the most widely dissected and criticized in bibliometrics and as a result have developed a bad reputation. Many people who criticize the impact factor then use the h-index, which is an appallingly deficient indicator that should strictly be used to compare two perfectly identical individuals. Altmetrics promised much and delivered little: there are no properly calibrated, reproducible, transparent altmetric indicators widely in use today.

It is possible to correct for the main flaw of the impact factor relatively easily and this is what professional bibliometricians have been doing for decades. There are also alternative indicators of journal impact, which are also based on the use of citations, and I much prefer those with all their limits compared to using the h-index of a journal or black-boxed altmetrics. We just need to enlarge the citation network to include the 60% of journals currently excluded from the mainstream bibliographic databases — this will also bring to the fore the scholarly contribution of the South and the increasingly important production of Far Eastern countries.

ATG: *From where you sit, what do you see as the key opportunities and challenges facing open access scholarly publishing?*

EA: I think access and diversity are the key challenges. We are shifting the problem of access from the capacity to read articles to the capacity to publish — this is the consequence of the APC model, which may further lock out less wealthy researchers from publishing in the best journals, even if they have very

good research. The problem of diversity is not linked with open access per se but is rather a continuation of the current industry consolidation trend. I sincerely hope we can find some ways to maintain diversity — ideas created in universities are not meant to be controlled by large firms.

ATG: *Leading a new, innovative company like Iscience is a challenge that demands a lot of time. But everyone needs a chance to recharge. What fun things do you like to do? What outside interests or activities do you enjoy?*

EA: I know it can be difficult to comprehend, but I truly love to work. This is why I can be so passionate about what I do. Otherwise, I'm a simple man. I like spending time with my family, going to the cinema with my wife, canoeing in the summer, snowshoeing in the winter, and just taking long walks in the spring and autumn when nature reveals its subtler details, when things are busy changing. I love spring, it is so full of hope, change and growth, and the light is particularly nice to take pictures. When I need a break, I go and work on our wooded lot, where I love to tend the forest. I love to work intellectually, but I replenish with manual work.

ATG: *Eric, thanks so much for taking the time to talk to us. We really appreciate it.*

EA: Thank you, it was truly a pleasure discussing these important issues with you. 🌱