People Profile: Mindy King
Pay-Per-View at the American Institute of Physics: One Scholarly Publisher’s Experience with “The Article Economy”

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Despite all the talk of the “article economy,” sales of single articles are a minor revenue source for scholarly publishers, who continue to rely on subscriptions and consortia deals for the vast majority of their income. (Publishers in some disciplines can count advertising as another source of revenue.) Yet the purchase of single articles obviously serves the needs of a significant number of users: My organization, the American Institute of Physics (AIP), for example, with a total article database of about 400,000 papers, sold an average of 560 articles per month from our Website in 2008. And that does not include articles sold through third-party document delivery services, such as Infotrieve, CISTI, and the British Library.

AIP, as it happens, was one of the first two publishers to enable anyone with a credit card to buy any article online, back in April 1998. The American Chemical Society was the other, and ACS beat us to the punch by a matter of hours. (We lost the bragging rights that come with the first press release!) Since AIP’s online platform, Scitation, hosts many other not-for-profit society publishers, we enabled each of them to enter the online single-article marketplace as well. “E-commerce” was the heavy talk of the day (this was before the dot.com bust around 2001), and publishers were pleased to have this new revenue stream from direct sales, though many undoubtedly expected more robust results.

In retrospect, the low number of direct article sales was partly due to the fact that we were still focused on “availability” and had not yet discovered “discoverability.” It took Google to teach us that.

Google is so much part of publishing DNA these days that it’s hard to remember how much resistance it met with originally. Publishers debated about allowing Google spiders to crawl our Websites for content — indeed, many publishers were still trying to build “portals” or “gateways” to corner online traffic in their disciplines. Why wouldn’t our users come directly to us for content — indeed, many publishers were allowing Google and the other search engines to crawl our Websites for their content, and as we all remember much fun was had by all (weren’t the shrimp and grits awesome!). Anyway, Rod and ProQuest continued to expand the famous ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

"The Article Economy"


EARLY LIFE: Grew up on a lake so spent most of my time either in it (swimming in the summer time) or on it (skating, skiing & snowmobiling in the winter time). Loved reading and as a child was constantly getting into trouble for reading into the wee hours of the night.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: After graduate school, spent seven years managing a small Health Sciences Library. I loved the variety I had in this “one person library” and was able to do everything from reference to cataloging. My current position is in a university setting and I love the excitement and energy generated by the students.

FAMILY: A wonderful husband and one very spoiled puppy!

IN MY SPARE TIME: I’m an avid football fan (Go Vikes!) and love doing anything outdoors.


GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: Hike all 206 miles of the Superior Hiking Trail (doesn’t have to be all at once).

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: That’s a tough one! I think there will definitely be a role for libraries, but we will need to switch our focus from “housing” information to helping our users gain access to the information they need.

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