

MAKING THE SHIFT TO E-ONLY PUBLISHING: BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ESTABLISHED JOURNALS

A BRIEFING SESSION SPONSORED BY THE SCHOLARLY COMMUNICATION STEERING COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 10, 2007

2:00 P.M.–3:00 P.M. • SALON F

Moderator:

James Neal, Vice President for Information Services and University Librarian, Columbia University

Presenters:

Rick Johnson, Senior Advisor, Association of Research Libraries

Judy Luther, President, Informed Strategies

Background

The current system of publishing scholarly journals in two formats – one print and one electronic – imposes a dual burden of expenses and costs. Both libraries and publishers must continue to maintain the infrastructure required for each format. In addition, tying scholarly communication to print publishing imposes substantial constraints on the scholarly publishing system. The dual format system imposes both opportunity costs and operational costs. While this situation persists, a variety of potential benefits from e-only publishing remain unrealized. Inevitably some content is excluded from broad distribution as other content consumes the extra resources required by dual format publishing.

Both libraries and publishers believe they have good reason to be cautious in abandoning print publishing. Each partner is understandably reluctant to move beyond the other's perceived comfort zone. However, it is increasingly unclear where the true barriers to moving to e-only publishing lie. Libraries are concerned that publishers are being overly conservative and need to be pushed while publishers are concerned that libraries will rebel if they plan to discontinue print publication. Concerns about preservation, maintaining society membership, author expectations, the true scale of savings, and the costs and complexities of conversion are cited by various parties but little formal investigation of the situation has been undertaken.

ARL has strong evidence that research libraries are rapidly making their own decisions regarding the necessity of continuing to subscribe to print formats of journals. A recent survey found that as early as 2005, research libraries had cancelled print formats for more than half of the content they licensed through bundles with the five largest commercial publishers. Those publishers were reported to have offered some incentives for print cancellation in the form of price breaks (ranging from 0-25%), but many research libraries cancelled print even when there was no subscription cost savings.²

Luther and Johnson are preparing a white paper commissioned by ARL to present a synthetic analysis and investigation of library and publisher perspectives on this situation. As well as considering the technical and operational challenges faced by both communities, they have examined perceptual data and socio-cultural issues. At this briefing session they will report on their systematic study of the situation and their work identifying the most important challenges that need to be addressed both from the library perspective and from the publisher perspective.

¹This issue was one of six challenges for collection development identified at the Janus Conference held in October of 2005. See <http://www.library.cornell.edu/janusconference/>.

²See Karla L. Hahn, "The State of the Large Publisher Bundle: Findings from an ARL Member Survey" *ARL Bimonthly Report*, no. 245 (2006): 1-6. <http://www.arl.org/newsltr/245/ARLBR245bundle.pdf>.