

Are STM publishers doing the right thing?

Perspectives from IPA president Michiel Kolman at APE 2017

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Abstract. The International Publishers Association (IPA) President Michiel Kolman provided his perspective into how scientific, technical, and medical publishers are leading the rest of the publishing industry in embracing an increasingly digital environment during his speech at the Academic Publishing in Europe (APE) 2017 conference in Berlin in January 2017. Kolman reflected on the conference's theme of Publishing Ethics to ask the question, "are publishers doing the right thing?" and challenged Europe to consider how best to support the important role publishers play in disseminating written ideas.

Keywords: International publishing, traditional publishing, STM publishing, digital access, open access

The IPA represents publishers around the world that are active in a whole range of publishing areas, from children's books and literary works to academic publishers. Fundamental to publishing is having the freedom to disseminate written ideas and protect and encourage creators. However, publishers increasingly face a challenging environment. For example, if you look at a typical publisher, say a children's book publisher, where books are published predominantly in print and sold through bookstores, there are major challenges with commercializing success in an increasingly digital world and avoiding piracy. Yet, publishers know that there are opportunities in e-commerce, in digital marketing, and new business models but have difficulty exploring these.

Kolman asserts that publishers are embracing change and looks to the STM publishers successful transformation to digital in the 1990s as shining example. Research articles attract an impressive amount of billions of downloads every year, resulting in the cost per article consistently decreasing. Articles are also downloaded from a variety of places including publisher's platforms, from institutional and subject repositories, and shared via online social networks demonstrating how STM publishers understand how users want to access and use research. Kolman states this as proof that academic publishers have embraced alternative business models, making sure authors have more publishing options and in collaborating well with each other and collectively introduce solutions that benefit all users. As such STM is viewed as a highly innovative industry, working with start-ups to drive innovation and make innovative ideas scalable, and also autonomous innovations in existing publishing houses. By any standard, Kolman states the STM publishers are a beacon of innovation for the broader publishing community.

1. Are STM publishers are doing the right thing?

If the STM publishers are on the right track, how did they manage this? Kolman argues that it was the forward thinking nature of STM publishers which has led to the ability to identify new trends, listen to customer needs and address their own shortcomings. Kolman identifies four examples of how the STM industry actively is improving the scientific ecosystem:

1. *Focus on innovation.* STM publishers have continually looked towards new trends and ideas in order to innovate to meet the needs of their users like researchers, students and governments. This has included looking at big data and new social media platforms to provide customized and personalized ways to better access and discover new research. Embracing new business models such as open access and considering broader technology to solve the needs of users not just today but also tomorrow.
2. *Focus on quality.* Particularly noted in today's environment is the need for quality and trusted content. STM publishers have continued to have a strong and unabated emphasis on quality control by finding new ways to improve peer review, a corner stone of this industry but more importantly of the world of research. This has resulted in new initiatives such as the publication of negative results or open peer review.
3. *Embracing diversity and inclusion.* STM publishers are also going beyond the scientific to lead the way on diversity and inclusion in the workplace. Kolman indicates this topic is close to his heart having been named in the Financial Times Top100 most influential LGBT senior executives for two years in a row. Kolman believes that it is the diverse and inclusive companies that will thrive in the future and attract the talent needed to continue to drive innovation within the industry.
4. *Collaborating to protect freedom to publish.* In many cases, during the process of providing tools and services to authors, publishers assume the same risks as writers. Underpinning this relationship is copyright, an indispensable legal instrument that protects the rights of creators and publishers. Publishers remain concerned about piracy and its ability to undermine the fundamentals of the publishing industry. Without a good framework for intellectual property rights, there is too little investment and innovation, endangering quality publishing. Kolman indicates that the IPA engages in fact finding missions to support the freedom of publishing, and, for example, work towards the release of imprisoned writers.

After 25 years in the STM publishing industry and in his role as the Senior Vice President of Global Academic Relations at Elsevier, Kolman can also provide a global perspective into how Europe can continue to support the publishing industry. Kolman argues that the publishing industry could be considered to be a "European gem", with its roots established in Europe. Yet, when considered in global perspective, Europe doesn't support or encourage the innovation being shown by the broader industry. Kolman in fact argues that the publishing industry ultimately benefits Europe, its citizens and also European science. As publishers continue to embrace the challenges of an increasing digital world, Kolman provides the perspective that we shouldn't be asking if publishers are doing the right thing – but if Europe is doing enough to help support such a booming industry critical to disseminating written ideas.

2. The International Publishers Association

The International Publishers Association (IPA) is the world's largest federation of national, regional and specialist publishers' associations. Its membership comprises 70 organisations from 60 countries in Africa, Asia, Australasia, Europe and the Americas. Through its members, IPA represents thousands of individual publishers around the world who service markets containing more than 5.6 billion people.