

Discussion: the future: will it work?

Sally Morris

Are the problems of the new electronic-only journals just the same as those of any new journal? It is important to test new economic models, but there are many problems associated with new journals, regardless of the mode of access.

Gillian Page

With electronic journals, we don't know how much research was done to make sure that enough authors would contribute. With print journals, the problem tends to be getting enough subscribers.

Don King

The question of publishing in parallel is answered by the fact that many journals have a very small readership. Extremes of readership (large versus small) are answered by journals being published in different formats. There is a niche for both.

Peter Burnhill

Should a library about to cancel subscriptions suggest to the publisher that it should publish the title electronically for a year, to see if a different format is more economically viable?

Don King

The notion that you save money when you are going from electronic to print is not true.

Helen Henderson

Publishers are paranoid about usage statistics – they don't want libraries to have statistics upon which to make the decision to cancel titles. They are also paranoid about individual article sales. How are publishers looking at this issue?

Bob Campbell

Blackwell's are not paranoid, and hope to show high usage of online journals once they have signed up to the [NESLI] agreement. They are finding extra revenue to compensate for cancelled titles coming from royalty payments, which are up from last year, as well as revenue from other intermediaries.

Hazel Woodward

Another economic model is the Biodoc. Cranfield University library cancelled all journal titles for their Biotechnology School five years ago, offering instead unlimited electronic access and document delivery. Firstly, this has not saved any money, but secondly, over 1500 titles have been consulted. Users would now not choose to go back to the old model of journal provision.

Don King

In the USA, 100 million copies of articles are distributed annually via interlibrary loans, preprints, and photocopies. If each article contributed \$2 to publishers, this is still not a large total sum.

David Pullinger

We cannot equate use with usefulness. A large number of citations does not mean an article is good – and we should beware of simplistic interpretation of data.

Fytton Rowland

We need to remind ourselves that scholarly publishing is a peculiar case; he who pays the piper does not call the tune. Libraries have no power, and cancellations are driven by academics. All in all, it is an unstable situation.

Don King

The most important aspect is to come up with an innovative pricing structure. In the past prices have gone up dramatically and billions of dollars have been lost. Everyone loses out: scientists, academics, librarians and publishers. The readership and the number of journals is the same, but everyone is losing out.

Christine Borgman

The scholar who writes articles is unsure of the economics of each journal. Our current project is designed to make authors more aware of these issues. The relationship between authors, librarians and publishers can be likened to one big dysfunctional family, with a lot of ingrained cyclical bad behaviour. Each is obsessed with counting the wrong things, but how do we change?

David Pullinger

So what should we be counting? The following points are worth considering:

- the way in which ten-year-olds learn;
- if publishers looked at electronic journals as an opportunity rather than a threat, they could widen the market – it is not a fixed cycle;
- user behaviour;
- charge authors for unread articles!