

SSP Annual Meeting Emphasizes Economics

Della Mundy

The Society of Scholarly Publishing (SSP) 26th annual meeting (San Francisco, 2-4 June 2004), arranged by Program Committee Cochairs Amy Brand and Diane Scott-Lichter, addressed the theme "Toward New Economies of Information Access". The meeting explored challenges facing scholarly publishers in the rapidly shifting socioeconomic and technologic climate by discussing changes in researcher behavior, in business models, in how information gets disseminated and preserved, and even in who serves as publisher.

Changes in researcher behavior were addressed by Carol Tenopir, of the University of Tennessee, in a plenary session on how researchers gather their information, not how they say they get it. Scholarly journals in their fields remain their most valuable resource, especially for medical professionals, who also rely most heavily on books. For engineers, reports are the best source. Scientists are the heaviest e-mail users. Nonscientists prefer print. Searching by content rather than browsing by title has increased. Medical faculty read about 322 articles a year at a mean 22 minutes per article; engineers read 72 articles a year at a mean 81 minutes per article.

Changing business models were described in nearly every session of the SSP meeting, including a session on the current state of the academic-library market. John Cox Associates Ltd International Publishing Consultancy finds that the US share of the world library market may be as high as 60%. The economic downturn in the United States and Europe, reflected in reduced budgets for higher education, has affected Western serials-purchasing power

DELLA MUNDY is principal editor in the Kaiser Permanente Department of Medical Editing. This report is condensed from a longer account she submitted.

but is offset by rapidly expanding library holdings in Asia. Academic institutions in the developed world have reacted by forming purchasing consortia of various models. COUNTER (Counting Online Usage of NeTworked Electronic Resources) released a code of practice early in 2003 that defines data elements for measuring remote use of institutionally licensed products.

Heather Joseph, of BioOne, commented that publishers are being driven to experiment with open access because of current market pricing policies. She discussed financial risk assessment based on Crow and Goldstein's *Open Society Institute Guide to Business Planning for Converting a Subscription-based Journal to Open Access* (www.soros.org/openaccess/oajguides/business_converting.pdf). Publishers should evaluate a move toward an open-access model by considering three indicators—cost structure, revenue, and operating margin—before replacing subscription charges with publication charges. To set such fees, publishers must calculate prepress processing costs, number of submissions (or acceptances) expected, whether partial or full payment of processing costs is desired, and how well authors' fees are accepted in a journal's field. Joseph also presented a sample article-fee calculation. Possible supplementary sources of income she mentioned included article-processing fees, reprint and offprint sales, advertising, and sponsorship. Joseph recommended preparing three sets of revenue-projections (best- to worst-case scenarios). She showed a useful template, "Sample Forecast for A[ny] Journal", and recommended repeating use of the template for each scenario.

Michael Clarke, of the American Academy of Pediatrics, told how AAP journals had passed from print-only institutional subscription to print rebundled. He talked about pricing by type of institution, emphasizing scalable pricing based on a simple tier system that is rational and

fair. Clarke also discussed the HighWire Open Collection, begun in 2003, by which institutions can choose which titles to subscribe to, according to standardized pricing structure and licensing guidelines with titles processed by any subscription agent. The HighWire system had 29 participating publishers as of June 2004.

Libraries and Publishers

In the premeeting session "Libraries, Licenses, Institutional Budgets, and Consortia: What's a Publisher to Do?" Will Wakeling, of Northeastern University, described academic-library funding and collection decision-making. Collection money comes from an operational budget allocation, endowments and gifts, and other sources, including dowries for new faculty, seeding funding for new programs, and cost-sharing with departments. Operational funding comes from a state source to any public university, from endowments and gifts or sponsored projects, and from capital campaigning. Formula-based budgeting for standard monographs vs serial components of the collection is changing as more electronic materials alter the traditional balance. Subscription cancellations are based on quality review, changing faculty priorities, use data, interlibrary-loan volume, and potential open-access issues.

James Mouw, of the University of Chicago, spoke on managing digital collections and user expectations, detailing how the library budget had increased in the last 15 years. Electronic serials made up 15% of the budget in 1998 but 87% in 2004. With increasing titles available electronically and reliance on e-access, the library is canceling print subscriptions to afford continued access. Increasing access is supported by open URL technology, federated searching, and citation software, all viewed as collection expenses. The problem of many (redundant) access mechanisms is

SSP *continued*

being addressed by a National Institute of Standards Organization (NISO)/Editeur working party. Disentangling the various means of access will be the solution despite resource limitations. Currently, measuring use of the components of the collection is the only way to know what patrons want. Use is being tracked as never before—annually, monthly, at renewal, and ad hoc. Reference transactions are counted, as well as borrowing statistics. Use cannot be the only factor, however, because “turnaways” of nonserved patrons remain troublesome. Suppliers can help by providing a clear contact point, aiming for stability (don’t change URLs), announcing changes in advance, and making renewals easier (contact the library before automatic expiration occurs and adopt the concept of “graced issues”).

Carol James, of the Genentech Library in Oakland, California, noted differences and similarities from a corporate-library perspective. Key factors in success include producing an excellent product, fair pricing, ease of use, rigorous peer review, and on-time production and delivery. She asked that publishers’ practice of creating tiered pricing as a response to tight economics be kept fair and simple—that changes in price structures be announced early and through multiple channels. She asked publishers to help in producing accurate use reports for budget-holders and to provide FAQs about their products for patrons. She also requested that publishers keep their Web-site design simple. Subscription agents must be in the loop on changes so that they can pass on information to their clients, the libraries. Ways to contact new users and match products to their information-gathering habits are needed, as are ways to help “old-timers” work through procedural and organizational change. Although libraries, wanting perpetuity of e-access and coagulation of resources into “big deals”, are more assertive about pricing, few consider publishers to be foes.

Rick Burke, of the Statewide California Electronic Library Consortium (SCELC), gave an insider’s view of consortia. He described how consortia form for many

reasons: to network, to purchase, to share technology, to enhance staff development, to share resources, or a combination thereof. Most consortia are composed of academic libraries; some are multitype consortia with academic, public, K-12, or corporate components. Consortia are organized either informally or formally. Burke described various aspects of the functioning of consortia, including funding sources and the processes of product selection, licensing, and pricing.

John Tagler, of Elsevier, outlined from the megapublisher’s perspective what works and what doesn’t and what can be learned from holding the largest share of library expenditures. Elsevier’s *Science Digest* e-platform holds 1800 journal titles. Elsevier also operates the Web search engine Scirus. Those products are marketed to corporations and individual users. Libraries have difficulty in keeping pace with information access, and the publishers can help. The problem for publishers is that the Internet is perceived as free by users. The value added by publishers is organization of material. Awareness of publishers’ value added is realized through licensing with libraries for their collection development and management.

The panel addressed the role of aggregators by asking whether librarians cancel print subscriptions when the material is available digitally from aggregators.

Researcher Perspectives

Another session, “Researcher Perspectives on Publishing”, was opened by Robert Simoni, of the *Journal of Biological Chemistry*, who described peer review as a “chancy business”.

Trudy Forte described her experience as editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Lipid Research* during the journal’s technologic transition between 1999 and 2003. Forte’s goal during her reign was to get out important information, and she felt that slowing the process was unacceptable because grants depend on publication. Rapid publication of more articles leads to increased visibility. Electronic versions of the journal became necessary as space was

lost to laboratories. Time to publication was reduced from 1 year to 3 to 5 months. Through a variety of measures, peer-review time was also decreased. Editorial decisions were then made within 48 hours. Ease of author use of the online-submission process was enhanced. Forte believes that science is for the public and that editorials can fulfill this expectation. Commenting on the journal’s impact factor, Forte noted that researchers tend to publish in journals held by libraries, and this indirectly reflects on a journal’s reputation. Forte endorsed the need for selective science-writing and editing assistance for postdoctoral fellows, students, and researchers whose first language is not English.

From a research administrator’s perspective, Richard Havel, professor emeritus of the University of California, San Francisco, Cardiovascular Research Institute, made it clear that publishing original research is required for biomedical-career advancement—that the cycle of passing peer review to get grants and publishing to get more grants continues. A record of publishing in high-impact journals is important for academic advancement. Havel cited how Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* received a bad review when presented at the Linnean Society. He recommended to the audience the book *Retrospectoscope* on the topic of publish or perish, in which are discussed “indolent scientists” or “geniuses with no time to write or publish”. Edison, for example, published little. Havel described a process similar to that experienced at the *Journal of Lipid Research* as the *Journal of Biological Chemistry* moved from print toward electronic publishing only. 