Annual Meeting Reports

Professionalizing the Editorial Office

Moderator:
Tony Alves
Aries Systems Corporation
North Andover, Massachusetts

Speakers:
Jason Roberts
Headache
Plymouth, Massachusetts

Elizabeth Blalock
Journal of Investigative Dermatology
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Julie Nash
J&J Editorial, LLC
Apex, North Carolina

Reporter:
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Texas A&M University
College Station, Texas

Current technology allows remote operation of editorial offices and so facilitates continuity of staff regardless of the editor-in-chief's location. With that continuity has come professionalization—the topic of this session.

Jason Roberts, managing editor of Headache, said that the days in which the journal staff was the editor-in-chief's spouse or a worker in the editor-in-chief's department are largely gone. He characterized today's editorial office as occupying a central position among various parties: the publisher, authors, sales staff, reporters, readers, and society. Editorial offices are now expected to meet higher standards than before, for example, regarding speed and efficiency.

Roberts noted that editorial staff members today ideally have the following skills: technical expertise (for tasks as diverse as improving image quality for publication and editing podcasts), project-management capability, facility in building relationships and managing people, and grounding in publishing (for instance, knowledge of production processes and journal finances). He reported that members of the International Society of Managing and Technical Editors have called for training in handling ethical issues, applying journal metrics, using social networking, improving images, repurposing digital content, and designing readership surveys. In closing, he stated that "editorial offices need to professionalize to respond to the increased complexity of journal publishing" and called for "well-trained staff who push peer-review management systems harder".

Elizabeth Blalock, managing editor of the Journal of Investigative Dermatology, emphasized the benefits of retaining editorial-office staff when a new editor-in-chief takes over. She showed a photograph of an orientation notebook for a new editor-in-chief and said that staff can be especially helpful during the transition period if they

- Discuss with the editor-in-chief the planning of editorial content (such as editorials, commentaries, invited review articles, and podcasts).
- Educate the editor-in-chief about the online peer-review system, the production schedule, editorial policies, ethical issues, scientific-misconduct procedures, and organizations that can serve as resources.
- Have the editor-in-chief review and consider revising editorial-board structure, decision letters, instructions for authors, the peer-review process, and the rebuttal process.

Day-to-day tasks can easily take priority over the editor-in-chief's overall goals for his or her tenure. To address this potential problem, Blalock recommended identifying the editor-in-chief's likes and strengths to help in deciding what he or she should focus on and what he or she should delegate. She said that an effective editorial office "frees the editor to concentrate on content".

Blalock also touched on other aspects of running an editorial office. For example, she showed how data led her journal to decrease its acceptance rate and limit manuscript length. She mentioned distributing quarterly editing tips to the editorial board.

Julie Nash, of J&J Editorial, LLC, spoke as a senior partner of an independent editorial company that manages multiple journals with different publishers. Her recommendations for working remotely with editors-in-chief included the following: Decide on a timetable and medium for periodic discussions (for example, weekly conversations by Skype). Provide journal performance reports regularly. Consider using an instant-messaging system. Set an ending time for your workday.

Nash suggested meeting the editor-in-chief if possible. "Nothing can replace meeting someone in person," she said. She also discussed deciding whether to have a home office or rent office space. Whatever the decision, she advised the following: Invest in fast Internet service—and have a backup plan, such as accessing the Internet at a nearby coffee shop. Consider obtaining an eFax account. Hire a part-time office assistant to do clerical and other routine work.

In closing, Nash identified advantages of having a limited-liability company (LLC) and discussed establishing one. An LLC, she said, protects a person from business debts and liabilities, separates business expenses from personal ones, and "gives an editorial office a more professional feel". She said that one can fill online oneself to form an LLC or have an attorney do the paperwork. She recommended that, in any case, an LLC have a good attorney and a good accountant.