Third Annual North American Conference of the International Society of Managing and Technical Editors

Sally Gainsbury and Jan McColm

The third annual International Society of Managing and Technical Editors (ISMTE) North American Conference was held in Washington, DC, 2–4 August 2010, and was noticeably larger this year, with 89 attendees versus the 55 attendees in Baltimore in 2009. A wide variety of journals, publishers, disciplines, and job descriptions were represented among the attendees, and the evening reception and breaks provided excellent networking opportunities.

Thinking Outside the Box: Publishing in the Post-Web World

John Sack, of HighWire Press, gave the opening keynote address with an interesting presentation on thinking outside the box when publishing in the post-web world. He noted how today’s successful corporations (e.g., Google, Apple, and Amazon) have found new markets by transforming traditional service provision and using technological advances to meet the needs of consumers in a unique manner. It was the ability of those companies to solve problems in innovative ways, set new goals, and transform their business models that led to their successes, particularly in comparison with companies that have stayed with traditional models (such as newspapers). Similarly, journals need to consider how to meet the needs of readers and authors in novel ways to take advantage of the new opportunities in today’s world. A key question driving these transformations is, “If the author and reader were in the same room, how would they communicate?” A multitude of innovations have occurred in publishing, but it is important to retain the central focus of communicating information and disseminating peer-reviewed research. Innovations include reference linking, publishing ahead of press, online letters to editors, topical browsing, customized alerts, and providing supplemental data online.

The presentation reviewed the results of interviews with eight (mostly early career) researchers to determine how they use technology and how journals can meet their needs. Rather than searching libraries or journals, researchers tended to use relevant search engines (PubMed, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and Google Search). It was apparent that researchers read articles, not journals, and they did this largely by reading annotated tables of contents e-mailed to them and scanning articles for relevant information. Readers wanted journals to be mobile (online and available on wireless devices) but also wanted to be able to print articles and take a break from the computer. A need that was not being met was the ability to keep track of reading, take notes in a useful way, and manage articles in an integrated manner. The preliminary nature of the results prevented strong conclusions, but the presentation highlighted the importance of experimenting with new technologies to integrate existing communication methods with novel techniques to meet readers’ needs.

Copyright 101

Joseph Barker, of John Wiley & Sons, gave a presentation on Copyright 101. Copyright is “a property right in an original work of authorship” in which the “original expression” is protected. That definition includes format, organization, sequence, and style but not facts, information, and ideas; and it covers all works, including literary, dramatic, and photographic works and computer code. Copyright provides its holders with the exclusive right to reproduce the work, prepare derivative works, distribute copies of the work, and display the work publicly. The purpose of copyright is to compensate authors, artists, and publishers, and permission generally must be sought from the copyright holder before a work can be reproduced, distributed, performed, displayed, or transformed into a derivative work.

US copyright law was written in 1923 and revised in 1978. Works created before 1923 are within the public domain and do not require permission. Works after 1923 have different protection, depending on whether they were created before or after 1978. Copyright exists as soon as the work is “fixed”; this includes being placed on the Internet or being sufficiently permanent or stable for reproduction. Works can be used without permission for some purposes, including criticism, teaching and reporting, commentary, scholarship, and research but not for profit or to promote a service. If a work is prepared by an employee within the scope of his or her employment or specially commissioned with an express agreement, it is considered a “work for hire”, and the employer holds the copyright. That is an important issue for journal editors to consider: some funding agencies may hold the intellectual-property rights to research, preventing researchers from submitting manuscripts for publication. Any authors submitting manuscripts that were based on funded research projects must ensure that they own the intellectual property to avoid potential problems with
funding agencies in transferring copyright to journals and publishers.

Attendees were urged to be cautious, take legal advice, and check with authors to ensure that no copyright infringements occur.

**Copyediting**

Katherine O’Moore-Klopf, of KOK Edit, introduced attendees to the world of copyediting, detailing what copyeditors do and explaining why copyeditors are necessary for journals. Unedited articles may have excellent research but can be error laden, incomplete, and inconsistently formatted. It is the task of the copyeditor to polish manuscripts so that they present the authors’ work accurately, represent the journal appropriately, and increase reader engagement. A copyeditor also ensures that a journal’s style is maintained and that authors are asked about inaccuracies. Copyeditors are needed in part because reviewers do not edit manuscripts; their task is to check the author’s technical content. Software can help in some instances of simple mistakes, but it is clear that the copyeditor cannot yet be replaced with technology.

**Journal Metrics**

Iain Craig, of Wiley-Blackwell, gave a timely presentation on journal metrics, which are becoming increasingly diversified, although the impact factor still plays a major role.

Two main commercial multidisciplinary products are used for journal metrics: Web of Science (Thomson Reuters) and Scopus (Elsevier), which represent approximately 10,000 and 16,500 journals, respectively. Traditional journal metrics (the impact factor, the 5-year impact factor, and total citations) are unweighted and treat all citations equally, whereas newer metrics (the SJR indicator, Eigenfactor, Article Influence, and Source Normalized Impact per Paper) are weighted and treat citations differently.

The impact factor has traditionally been used to evaluate journals and individuals; the latter gain promotions and research grants on the basis of the impact factor of journals in which they have published. It is based on the number of citations in a given census period (such as 2009) to all items in a particular journal published in a given target period (such as 2007–2008) divided by the number of citable items published in that journal during the target period. Several problems with the impact factor were raised, including too short a target period (it takes some time before papers are cited), differences in referencing behavior among journals and disciplines, inclusion of citations of “noncitable” items, and differences in database coverage among subjects. For those and other reasons, newer journal metrics have been developed to take some of the factors into consideration and attempt to correct for them.

However, despite the extensive time, effort, and calculations involved, two central factors appear to largely determine the values of any journal metric: the quantity of the productive core or the number of publications and the impact of the productive core or total citation counts. The presentation explored some of the broader problems with existing journal metrics and the continual attempt to quantify and rank journals. Suggested developments for journal metrics include measurements based on individual article use, post-publication peer review and feedback, composite measures (usage, citations, and post-peer review), and individual researcher profiles.

**Reporting Standards**

Jason Roberts, managing editor of *Headache*, gave a well-attended breakfast presentation on reporting standards to improve the quality of submitted biomedical and science journal manuscripts. Roberts outlined how reporting problems undermine manuscripts (methodologic weaknesses often lead to rejection of papers) and why editorial offices should get involved (they have a vested interest in improving manuscript quality). One solution is mandating reporting guidelines at the submission stage (to improve manuscript quality, acceptance rate, and future citations). Roberts suggested that clear goals for improving reporting standards be set and resources allocated to that end. Finally, the EQUATOR Network ([http://www.equator-network.org](http://www.equator-network.org)) was presented as an international initiative set up to improve the reliability and value of medical research literature, and these resources can be used to improve reporting standards.

**Excel Tips and Tricks**

Tom McClung, of ACE Private Risk Services, presented an excellent session on Excel, covering such topics as basic formatting rules for working with data (for example, no blank lines), grouping sheets and other fun things you can do with them, applying formatting, filtering, and different formulas.