Recognition for Reviewers

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Although comprising a core element of scholarly publishing, reviewers are often viewed as the unsung, invisible heroes of the realm. This session presented a number of approaches that companies are using to provide greater recognition to these individuals. In a landscape that is increasingly trending toward transparency in all aspects of publishing, the speakers also touched on the complications that this ideal introduces for maintaining the integrity of the review process.

The act of inviting an individual to review a manuscript is in itself a form of recognition. As Josh Dahl explained, this is the first step in acknowledging that a person is an expert in the field. To that end, it is necessary to invite the most appropriate reviewers for a given manuscript. Dahl shared how ScholarOne is assisting journals with the problem of finding appropriate reviewers through the use of their online Reviewer Locator tool. This system facilitates the reviewer-invitation process by using a honed algorithm to find and suggest the best reviewers for a given manuscript. Since its introduction in February 2014, the invitation-acceptance rate was 36%, compared with 38% when reviewers were invited by traditional means. The tool also allows journals to discover new reviewers in order to augment their reviewer database.

The value of these submitted reviews is then emphasized by Rubriq’s mission to provide an independent peer review service for its users. Jody Plank described Rubriq’s website as a way to identify a paper’s strengths and weaknesses before submission, thereby enabling an author to create a scientifically sound “first impression” to a journal upon submission. Rubriq provides a double-blind peer review service with a standard of three reviewers per paper. These reviewers are paid $100 per review, with a stipulated turnaround time of four to five days. Research on their reviewer pool has shown that these individuals value the non-financial aspects of this process, such as the learning experience and opportunity to help authors. However, although Rubriq offers alternative incentives such as a donation to charity or a submission credit, the majority of reviewers still opt for the financial honorarium.

Rubriq also provides its reviewers recognition via certificates attesting to the completion of a review. This has been an inexpensive and popular method of appreciation, particularly among international reviewers. Additionally, a less tangible benefit that Rubriq offers their reviewers is an improved user experience by way of its custom scorecard system. This straightforward and streamlined form for inputting reviews has resulted in chiefly positive feedback from their reviewers.

Andrew Preston concluded the session with an explanation of how Publons works to provide outward credit for peer review while maintaining the integrity and confidentiality of the process. Publons aims to speed the scientific process by collecting reviews and turning them into measurable research output. Reviewers can take public credit for their specific reviews as well as track their output and performance over time. These data can then be exported as a measure of career progress. In tandem, Publons also recognizes their best reviewers on a quarterly basis by providing non-financial incentives that have been donated by publishers (e.g., a credit toward a publication fee). Efforts are made to honor embargo policies and individual journals’ wishes to remain anonymous. Journal participation is encouraged but not required; the system is user driven, and postpublication, reviewers are able to list the titles of the papers that they reviewed without author permission.

All three presenters described how their companies and products are helping to recognize and reward reviewers in formats that extend beyond the standard practice of a published list of names in a journal each year. Although peer review is constantly evolving, their continued progress represents the hope of advancing toward a publishing future when integrity is rewarded while confidentiality is maintained.