

Sojourning in Cyberspace, or What I Learned on the Web

Speakers:

Bill Silberg

JAMA

Chicago, Illinois

John Sack

High Wire Press

Stanford, California

Reporter:

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Cardiology in the Elderly and

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New Orleans, Louisiana

"Time on the Web is not like time anywhere else", said Bill Silberg, Webmaster of the American Medical Association (AMA) Website. John Sack seconded this sentiment, describing the explosion in online journals published by High Wire Press in just 1 year. The AMA Website began as an experiment put together by the information-resources and computer-publishing staff at the AMA, said Silberg. The experiment began with no staff, little money, bare-bones content, minimal strategy, and about 2000 page views (visits) per week.

One year later, the AMA home page has become a major corporate site, with publications and spinoffs. It is a consumer-health site, has interactive applications (a searchable database that includes every doctor in the United States), and editorial, production, and marketing staffs, including 7 full-time staff members, 2 full-time editors, and several medical editors.

Today it has a whopping 500 000 page views per week and over 210 000 registrants. What has made this site so successful, said Silberg, are, first, its content (you cannot let yourself be mesmerized by technology—if its content is not superior, your technologically sophisticated site will not fly) and, second, people with editorial skills who decide what is good and what is not.

Content should be updated frequently (daily, weekly, or monthly) or changed in presentation. The content should be able to build and sustain interest among various

groups. Your readership might grow. A Web page should be redesigned at least twice a year. AMA experience shows that readers like interactive applications; if you don't have any, try one out.

A final word from Silberg: If you are going to be a Webmaster, you must take it seriously, but it's best if you have fun doing it.

High Wire Press has had equally astounding growth in a single year. It has gone from publishing just 2 journals online a year ago to 14 today, and 36 more are waiting in the wings.

Sack credits part of this success to High Wire's location as a separate department at Stanford University, where staff members have close contact with both readers and writers of scientific journals.

Before a decision to go online can be made, numerous questions must be addressed. What features should be included? Will going online help or hurt? How can everyone take advantage of this new technique? How will journal content be affected? What sort of investment will it entail? Can we save money?

Publishers, editors, and researchers have different perspectives when trying to answer such questions, said Sack. Publishers see an

online journal as a new distribution system; editors see it as a new medium, an outlet for their editorial voice; and researchers see it as a new language. Publishers want to know whether putting a journal online will help or hurt subscriptions, advertising, or their society; editors want to know whether going online will help or hurt the journal, authors, and readers and worry about the impact on staff; while researchers are interested in what will help their discipline, laboratories, grant funding, research, patients, and researchers.

The big fear for publishers is how to avoid losing money; for editors, how to avoid losing content; and for researchers, how to avoid losing face.

Who reads online journals anyway? Pretty much the same persons who read print, but 20% to 40% are new readers. Users are librarians, FOG (faculty old guard), focused researchers, and postdoctoral researchers who love hyperlinks and copying images to use in the classroom.

So should you start your own Website or put your journal online? Silberg and Sack agree that there is nothing to lose and that you just might gain a lot. Check them out:

<http://www.ama-assn.org>

<http://www.highwire.stanford.edu>

Managing Editor

A national medical society, The American Society of Neuroradiology, located in the western suburbs of Chicago, is seeking a talented Managing Editor to handle the day-to-day functions of its peer-reviewed scientific journal — *The American Journal of Neuroradiology*. Responsibilities include the management of the editorial process and production of this monthly publication. Must have previous background in supervising editorial staff, overseeing the production and printing process, and establishing excellent working relationships with vendors, contractors and authors. Editorial and proof reading skills helpful. Degree in Journalism, English or related field with 3 to 5 years of supervisory experience in medical or scientific publishing. Send cover letter and resume to: Kevin P. Smith, Director of Communications, ASNR, 2210 Midwest Road, Suite 207, Oak Brook, IL 60521, Fax: 630-574-0661.