

◆ Manuscript Tracking Systems

Speakers:

William T Carden Jr
Carden Jennings Publishing Co Ltd
Charlottesville, Virginia

Julian Fisher
Medico Inc
Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts

Patricia Baskin
GeneClinics
Seattle, Washington

Larry Gauthier
The Editorial Assistant
Whitemore Lake, Michigan

Kimberly Conner
Cadmus Journal Services
Richmond, Virginia

Reporter:
Ruth Stephens
Texas A&M University
College Station, Texas

At the beginning of this session, the speakers described their manuscript tracking systems. Two hours of system demonstrations followed.

William T Carden Jr, president of Carden Jennings Publishing, opened the session by describing how to create office efficiency with a manuscript tracking system. He said that gains in efficiency are made by improving work flow with such tools as a good tracking system. Carden recommended these steps when evaluating office efficiency:

- Detail the informational needs of all participants.
- Look at office communication to participants and detail the types used.
- Create a "life of the manuscript" flow chart.
- Meet with multiple vendors and challenge

them to develop solutions for your problems.

In discussing how to create a more powerful peer-review process with a tracking system, Larry Gauthier contributed his expertise as president of EA Software. According to Gauthier, the quality and value of a journal are measured by the appropriateness, accuracy, and timeliness of its contents. Gauthier said that peer review improves the first two items but can impede timeliness.

Over time, Gauthier said, selecting the right reviewer the first time becomes the

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most important criterion in meeting the criteria of appropriateness, accuracy, and timeliness. Tracking systems help by collecting data, which are used to develop a list of appropriate reviewers for submitted manuscripts.

Kimberly Conner, of Cadmus Journal Services, described how using an integrated system can save a journal time and money in administration, postage and mailing, and manuscript transactions.

For a system to be effective, Conner said, it should have several features, including

- A system in which authors can submit text and graphics in any format.
- An automatic updating system.
- Access 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- Immediate access to reviewer profiles.
- Sophisticated searching features.
- An intuitive and easy-to-learn format.

Patricia Baskin, managing editor of

GeneClinics, shared her experience gained in developing a customized tracking system.

Baskin said that the benefits of designing your own system include customization and flexibility for modification as the need arises. Designing a customized system is feasible when an in-house programmer is available so that the work does not add substantially to cost and when long-term use is expected.

The drawbacks, she said, include the high cost of a programmer and the need for more time for testing, staff input, and training. Baskin suggested that designing a specialized system is probably not necessary if customization is not an issue or if the journal office is small and could benefit from a simple tracking system that uses a program like Access or Excel.

Julian Fisher, president of Medico Inc, which produces PaperPath, wrapped up the session by describing general aspects to look for and items to be wary of when evaluating tracking systems. He recommended

- Looking for industry standards when selecting a tracking system.
- Being careful of proprietary software, fads, and software for specialized systems.
- Making sure that the company has a solid background and track record.
- Making sure that the software is designed for the future.
- Looking for software that can be configured by users.
- Making sure that the system has an open database for easy access.

Other important features, Fisher said, are the ability to do and submit reviews online, knowledge of how data are stored, ease of use, clear screen designs, simple training, and prompt and economical software support.

After the first part of the session ended, the speakers took posts by their tracking systems. Many meeting attendees watched demonstrations of the systems and asked questions. ■