

The 21st Annual SSP Meeting: Highlights of the Plenary Sessions

Barbara Meyers

President

Meyers Consulting Services

Adelphi, Maryland

Linda Beebe

Parachute Publishing Services

Washington, DC

Titled "Is the Real Revolution Just Beginning?" the 1999 annual meeting of the Society for Scholarly Publishing (SSP) focused on recent technologic advances. The plenary sessions of the meeting, held 9-11 June in Boston, are summarized below.

The Scholarly E-Journal: Has the Potential Been Realized?

The opening plenary session was moderated by James J. O'Donnell, professor of classical studies and vice provost for information systems and computing at the University of Pennsylvania. O'Donnell said that as both scholar and editor he has been interested in electronic publishing since it began and has been impressed with how fast it has scaled up.

Ann Okerson, associate university librarian at Yale University, related how she has spent the last 10 years engaged in "electronic-journal watching". In the early years (circa 1990), she reported, there were fewer than 10 academic electronic-journal titles, and those journals were free. By 1999, there were over 7800 titles reported in the ARL Directory of Electronic Journals, and that figure does not include at least 5000 of the large multinational publishers' titles. Okerson provided an excellent list of milestones from the last decade (see box on next page).

Okerson's prognosis for 1999-2005 is that all significant STM (science-technology-medicine) journals will be on the World Wide Web, linked and interlinked; archiving solutions will be sought by publishers and librarians together; financial transitions will be worked out; the power of library consortia will increase; and there will be a new understanding

of value-added activities in electronic publishing.

Okerson noted that over the last decade, reader access and convenience, such functionalities as interfaces and links, and the potential for multimedia applications have increased greatly. There is still room for creativity, trials, and innovations.

Ghassan Rassam, now executive director of the American Fisheries Society, reported on the electronic publication Optics Express (OE), which was launched in 1995 while he was director of publications at the Optical Society of America (OSA). A totally electronic journal, the publication represents a collaborative effort of the society as an organization and the scientists as a market. OE is now in its fourth volume, provides free access to its contents, and is

Communication is only one of the goals of scholarly publishing.

indexed by the Institute for Scientific Information. OSA was able to keep the journal free because costs were low and publication charges were paid by authors.

O'Donnell interjected here that "if you take information and save it to a disk for storage, you are a librarian. If you do the same thing in a machine with a cord coming out of it, you are a publisher."

Vicky Reich, assistant director of HighWire Press (HWP), then set forth the HWP philosophy of building content, adding services, and creating derivative products for publishers. HWP publishers are collaborating, not just through linking their materials, but also by bringing their materials on one subject together at the time of editorial development.

O'Donnell closed the first part of the session by adding his own thoughts on electronic publishing. In the beginning, he suggested, we were thinking of ease of access, lower cost, a lower barrier to

entry for new titles, increased speed of publication, and new forms of presentation. We did not always account for other obstacles, such as these: Communication is only one of the goals of scholarly publishing; prestige markers are valuable and hard to come by; there is a reluctance to abandon print; and the network is not yet ubiquitous.

O'Donnell's facility as moderator was grandly demonstrated during the plenary session, especially in the latter part, when there was an open discussion from the floor about the National Institutes of Health (NIH) E-biomed proposal. Okerson summarized the key features of the proposal, which was set forth by NIH's Harold Varmus and David Lipman along with Pat Brown of Stanford. (See the NIH Web site, www.nih.gov, for the original proposal and an addendum responding to select concerns voiced by the publishing, library, and scientific communities.) The original impetus for the proposal was cited as a desire to facilitate information access, advance national public policy through dissemination of publicly funded research, enhance productivity, and display technology in the best, most advanced manner possible.

Audience members did not speak in support of the proposal. Many suggested that the proposal would have its greatest effect—a detrimental effect—on professional membership societies that rely heavily on journal subscription revenues to sustain their operations. Jan Fleming, past president of SSP and vice president of Cadmus Journal Services, was especially fervent in her remarks that the proposal did not account for the educational programs undertaken by societies that can be supported only through such revenue sources as publications. Ed Rekas, director of publications at the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology, reported on a meeting of the federation's societies with Varmus and Lipman. Nothing was resolved, inasmuch as the NIH proposal clearly indicates that the resource burden should be borne by authors rather than subscribers

and would thus necessitate radical changes in societies' fiscal management.

A View on Tomorrow

The second plenary session looked at what will happen to knowledge development and dissemination in a computer-based society. As moderator, Barbara Meyers, past president of CBE and president of Meyers Consulting Services, set the stage for the session by suggesting that the future could be bright if we open ourselves up to alternatives rather than passively accepting degradation or staunchly refusing to try innovations.

Three panelists described a tomorrow that looks very different for publishers of scholarly materials. The first two, Richard Johnson and David Shulenberg, focused on alternatives to what they consider excessively priced journals. Johnson, director of the Association of Research Libraries SPARC (Scholarly Publishing & Academic Resources Coalition), described the partnerships initiated to launch new, less expensive journals in the STM market. The 169-member coalition, made up of libraries with a total purchasing power of \$750 million a year, seeks long-term solutions, he said, that include more competition and more cost-based pricing. It plans to use its buying power to serve as a catalyst to encourage lower-priced options and new models of dissemination. Supporting incremental and transformative efforts, Johnson said, it wants to encourage a mix of commercial and nonprofit publishers.

Shulenberg, provost of the University of Kansas, has proposed a new repository for scholarly journal articles: the National Electronic Article Repository (NEAR). As he envisions it, NEAR will be a searchable database that provides free access to any journal article within 90 days of its publication date, although he noted that the time frame might be altered. His intention is to drastically limit publishers' ability to raise prices, which he noted rose by 175% between 1986 and 1998 while the

consumer price index rose by 49%. Shulenberg said that his solution would continue the current refereeing models, make scholarly material available inexpensively, create room for new journals, and ensure permanence for archived materials.

Both men noted other options for dealing with the crisis in serial prices. Johnson suggested that the library community could do nothing and allow the system to collapse, copyright assignment could be altered, peer review could be separated from publishing, and the tenure and promotion system could be modified. Shulenberg recounted a long list of options that included page charges, pay-per-view, federal appropriations, dramatic increases in library budgets, buying cooperatives, organized author efforts, and antitrust activities.

Gerry McKiernan, science and technology librarian and bibliographer for the Iowa State University Library, described postmodern scholarly information in terms of access, organization, and navigation. McKiernan noted that the article, not the journal, has become the basic unit. Instead of being analogues of print jour-

nals, electronic journals should enhance access to information. "Transformational communication", he said, is adaptable, dynamic, flexible, fluid, mutable, and malleable. With pay-per-view journals, one buys only what one needs and can afford; and aggregators serve as gateways. People can use artificial intelligence to organize material automatically, navigate space, and get to specific points. The old ways of searching will be enhanced by new tools that use sound and touch, such as a system for representing relevance by pitch or a "feel-it" mouse. 

The 1999 SSP annual meeting also included 10 concurrent sessions. Among the subjects addressed were production issues, document delivery, new-journal launches, electronic file submission, library issues, content management, print-on-demand, and the electronic book. For further information, please see the SSP Web site, www.sspnet.org.

Some Milestones in the History of Electronic Journals*

Year	Milestone
1991	LAN-L preprint server begins.
1992	AAAS Online Journal of Current Clinical Trials and Elsevier TULIP project begin.
1993	Mosaic unveils the World Wide Web.
1994	Copyright becomes a hot issue again with the US Green Paper.
1995	HighWire Press at Stanford and the MUSE Project at Johns Hopkins University Press are started.
1996	Academic Press offers IDEAL marketing concept (package sale to library consortia), and JSTOR is marketed. Licensing becomes a hot topic. Many STM journal publishers launch or plan electronic journals. Library consortia negotiate aggressively for databases.
1997	Electronic-journal pricing and distribution models begin to evolve and diversify.
1998	Balance of electronic journals shift from free to for-pay versions of print journals.
1999	Cost savings are a dream of the past. In March, NIH E-biomed proposal is set forth; old hopes and fears are back.

**From presentation by Ann Okerson, 1999 SSP annual meeting.*