

## *The Arcanum of Bricks and Clicks: What Is the Right Mix To Survive Today's Publishing Watershed?*

**Moderator:**

**Ton Duut**

The Gordon and Breach Publishing  
Group  
Newark, New Jersey

**Panelists:**

**Christopher Schneider**

The Gordon and Breach Publishing  
Group  
Newark, New Jersey

**Praveen Singh**

Thomson Press India  
New York, New York

**Reporter:**

**Ava W Navin**

Journal of Emerging Infectious  
Diseases  
Atlanta, Georgia

With increasing demand for free online content, the challenge for publishers is to attain a balance between print and electronic services and to survive financially. Income from print products will most likely be reduced.

Praveen Singh of Thomson Press presented short-term goals for new technology. He listed the strengths and weaknesses of various formats, of which XML is the clear frontrunner. Despite its high development costs, XML has become the international standard, with wide industry acceptance. Companies supporting XML include Microsoft, Netscape, Sun Microsystems, Adobe, IBM, Corel, and Hewlett-Packard. XML provides most of

the advantages of SGML (search capabilities, component reuse, and interchangeability with different media) but is robust and easier to implement. Outweighing its higher initial costs is the likelihood of later savings on electronic products; and products being developed for XML promise to reduce the initial costs. Applications for XML include technical documentation, Web-site development, and e-commerce. For editors, Singh emphasized the importance of learning these coding schemes; editing and structuring of documents will

*The future might lie in a  
combination of XML and  
print-on-demand . . .*

be a combined activity in the future, so editors need to understand coding schemes like XML and be aware of the tools available for their implementation.

Christopher Schneider summarized the outlook for publishers in an age when consumers are demanding information at a lower cost—or free, with no barriers. He cited the examples of Napster's free music and PubMed Central, an attempt to circumvent the middleman of publishing and distribution. E-commerce vendors now find themselves compelled to impose fees, and publishers trying to offer electronic products at a profit are finding it difficult. However, without such barriers

the government — meaning us, the taxpayers — must pay for the technology. There will still be a role for the publisher as a filter, to support peer review and editing. With the initiatives in electronic peer review and publishing by government or government-funded institutions, such as the National Institutes of Health and Los Alamos National Laboratory, we should contemplate the future ramifications of the government's involvement in this part of the publishing process.

The definition of publication itself is changing. A study group has proposed a distinction between preprints and definitive publication (final peer-reviewed articles). In addition, the issue of archiving has not yet been resolved. A safe standard for research is still being sought. The difficulty is links to URLs, which are unreliable moving targets.

In the meantime, publishers still depend on print revenues and subscription models. Customers—and editors—still want hard copy. New devices for reading e-books are not yet acceptable to consumers. The future might lie in a combination of XML and print-on-demand, which would allow responsiveness to the market.

Both print and online versions coexist, but at some point the print version will cease, at the risk of losing subscribers. The question is when to pull the plug. Print must be adapted to an online form so that citability is preserved. The goal for the publisher is to achieve "streams of information" that are readable, citable, searchable, and indexable. 