

Editing Ins and Outs: The Question of Editing Inhouse or Outsourcing

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Associations have various options when it comes to copyediting their journals. They can use only inhouse editors, outsource their editorial operation, or have freelance editors supplement their inhouse editing. "I have noticed recently that there seem to be a great many associations that are using either all freelance editors or the editorial services of their printers", CSE member Diane B Lang recently observed.

Is this observation part of a trend? Are more associations having manuscripts for their journals edited by freelance manuscript editors or editorial services of their printers instead of by inhouse editors?

"One of the interesting things about scholarly publishing is that it is sometimes hard to collect data to verify supposed new trends that might be emerging", says Barbara Meyers, president of Meyers Consulting Services. "Often the trend is more a product of anecdotes than actuality and may or may not be proved true over time. It often seems that for every society that outsources a function, there is another that has decided to bring the function back inhouse. And there are those maintaining the status quo." An in-depth research study would be necessary to assess whether a trend exists, but we decided to consult editors at a variety of associations to get a glimpse of the situation. The responses show why some associations choose to edit inhouse, why others use freelance editors, and why still others do both.

The following editors at associations provided responses:

Vickie Ancona
Managing Editor, Book and Journal
Production
American Mathematical Society

Michael Clarke
Managing Editor
American Academy of Pediatrics

Susan J A Harris
Senior Director, Journals
American Psychological Association

Linda Illig
Director, Journals
American Society for Microbiology

Cheryl Iverson
Managing Editor
American Medical Association
Archives Journals

Diane B Lang
Assistant Director of Publications:
Editorial Services
Radiological Society of North
America

Cathy Mendelson
Managing Editor
*Journal of Vascular and Interventional
Radiology*

Robert W Milkey
Executive Officer
American Astronomical Society

Diane Scott-Lichter
Director, Publishing
American Cancer Society

Diane M Sullenberger
Executive Editor
*Proceedings of the National Academy of
Sciences*

Inhouse

Ancona: The American Mathematical Society (AMS) publishes 12 journals and distributes another eight. Of the eight, five are published in both print and electronic formats, and three are electronic-only. Our inhouse staff edits most of our journals. We do have three journals that are "camera-ready", so they come to us in final form, and we don't edit them. At AMS, our manuscript editors also insert corrections

and create the final files that are sent to the printer. This has streamlined the process and in some cases has reduced the amount of time from submission to published product.

Lang: The Radiological Society of North America owns and publishes two journals: *Radiology* and *Radiographics*. We have an editorial staff of 15 for the two journals; the staff includes managing editors, senior manuscript editors, manuscript editors, and a manuscript editor assistant.

Outsourcing

Clarke: We use a combination of freelance copyeditors and copyeditors associated with our printer-compositor. We have had this arrangement for at least 10 years.

Mendelson: The Society of Interventional Radiology (SIR) owns and publishes the *Journal of Vascular and Interventional Radiology* with the assistance of Lippincott Williams & Wilkins (LWW), which provides copyediting services. Previously, our journal was copyedited by an inhouse editor. LWW recently consolidated its editorial production services into one location. The result was laying off of most of the staff in the Philadelphia office, where our journal production-editing had been housed for 5 years. The copyeditor for our journal was laid off; however, to my good fortune, she has continued to work on the journal as a freelance. That facilitated what would otherwise have been a much more difficult transition.

Milkey: The American Astronomical Society (AAS) publishes three scholarly journals: *The Astrophysical Journal* (including *Letters*), *The Astrophysical Journal Supplements*, and *The Astronomical Journal*. The copyediting-layout process is handled by the staff at the University of Chicago Press (UCP) as an inhouse function. We contract all aspects of the pro-

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duction and distribution of the journals to UCP. In the middle 1990s, this function was consolidated as an inhouse-only function by UCP as part of a reengineering project that resulted in the online editing of SGML for each journal article. That was done with an understanding of the new content that would be required to provide a fully electronic journal. We launched our electronic editions in 1996-1997. AAS never did this editing as an inhouse function.

Scott-Lichter: The American Cancer Society publishes three journals. Copyeditors are full-time staff with our commercial publisher (not freelance editors or other vendors, such as printers) and dedicated to our journals. Society staff oversee the copyediting.

Sullenberger: We publish one journal, the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America (PNAS)*. We use editors associated with our printer, Cadmus. At least one is a former PNAS staff person. In 1995, copyediting was moved from inhouse to Cadmus. For a large, multidisciplinary journal, outsourcing the copyediting allows flexibility regarding seasonal fluctuations in volume and allows for knowledge of style and terminology across a wide variety of scientific disciplines, in that our vendor can pull from a large pool of resources.

Combination

Harris: The American Psychological Association (APA) publishes 48 journals; APA owns 31 titles and publishes the other 17 in collaboration with our APA Division colleagues, as well as society affiliations. We have a staff of 30 full-time and part-time production editors (who do the copyediting), including several supervisors. We also have four managers who oversee the copyediting, manufacturing, and online delivery of the journals. We do use freelance editors for editing support but primarily for proofreading support. The number of inhouse staff vs freelance staff and the ratio of one to the other have remained fairly constant with no expectation of any changes. We are looking to improve efficiency by expanding

our online editing tools through inhouse development and through services offered by our composition vendors.

Illig: The American Society for Microbiology (ASM) publishes 11 journals. We use inhouse copyeditors and freelance copyeditors—former ASM staff only. Outside freelances cannot be used. The work is very detailed and specific. It takes 6 to 7 months of full-time training for a trainee to be promoted to copyeditor.

Iverson: It is a mix. We have a staff of nine inhouse manuscript editors for the *Archives* and seven inhouse editors for *JAMA* and a freelance editing group of seven freelance manuscript editors and three freelance copyreaders (that is, word-for-word proofreaders).

What other observations do you have with regard to editing inhouse vs outsourcing? Is there a trend toward outsourcing?

Mendelson: The journal editor and I have always considered copyediting an important and valuable process, but I have the disturbing impression that that view is not widely shared by commercial publishers. The trend in publishing seems to be toward emphasizing speed and cost, sometimes at the expense of quality.

Iverson: From time to time, the question arises whether we might want to have more of the editorial work done by freelances. Whenever the association brings consultants to analyze the “financial picture” of all phases of its projects and business, this is always reviewed. To date, it has never been found to be cost-effective to outsource all the editing, and we have found that the freelance group provides a nice way to supplement the inhouse editorial work—during vacations, leaves, and vacancies and for special projects (for example, extra pages added for a special issue or rush material). Our freelance editors only edit, so we have a staff of three inhouse (a manager and two freelance coordinators) who do all the follow-up work on the editing done by the freelance manuscript editors (for example, corresponding with the author,

getting the figures and tables that have been edited by the freelance to the graphics and production unit, reviewing page proofs, and sending them to the author).

Meyers: In the case of societies and associations, there may be a trend toward outsourcing copyediting on a more frequent basis (I sincerely doubt that there is wholesale outsourcing of whatever degree of substantive editing may be done for a particular journal), given the need for nonprofits to increase the cost-effectiveness of their publishing operations. However, I know of no published study that would substantiate an increase in the actual number of societies that are now engaged in using freelance copyeditors or vendor editorial services.

A number of variables can influence a society's decision to outsource copyediting, such as (in no particular order of importance)

- Subject matter—many editorial decisions are discipline-dependent.
- Editorial preference—new editors-in-chief in particular will sometimes make changes in the editorial process as they strive to make their mark on a journal.
- Staff preference—a new director of publications may have had good experiences with outsourcing and bring that legacy to his or her new position.
- Financial considerations—changes in a society's economic environment that affect the entire organization or just the publishing program may warrant a decision to outsource.
- Vendor influence—over time, a vendor may suggest outsourcing to a society with the promise of cost savings and enhanced efficiencies (the validity of such claims will vary with each society's particular publishing situation).
- Peer influence—scholarly publishing has a history of lemming-like behavior, and often there is a shift in procedures after a particularly persuasive presentation or publication outlining one society's success.

Whether a trend exists, we cannot tell. But whatever you choose—inhouse or outsourcing—make sure you are not jumping off the cliff. 🚫