

## STM Workflows: The Latest and Greatest

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Improved editing, layout, and workflow programs continue to streamline publication production, but the process of choosing and transitioning to new systems can yield many pitfalls. Resistance to change, program incompatibility, and communication difficulties can bog down any attempt to revise the production process. Panel members offered a number of suggestions for how to hurdle obstacles and handle recalcitrant staff members when implementing workflow changes.

During a recent overhaul of its editorial and production process, the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and the AMA's *Archives Journals* sought to head off problems by dedicating staff members to evaluate the existing systems and workflow and determine the biggest obstacles.

Because the changes were stressful, staff members resistant to change were paired with those excited about the new processes, and that helped to defuse some of the opposition.

A paper-based workflow; the use of outdated, proprietary systems for editing, submission and peer review, and content tracking; and a poor relationship with the information-technology staff were among the problems targeted. To resolve those issues, first, a detailed workflow map was created, showing all redundancies and "black holes" where work was being duplicated or lost. Second, the outdated editing system previously in use was upgraded to Microsoft Word 2003 paired with eXtyle, a program plug-in that automates such processes as text styling and reference renumbering and that exports content in extensible markup language (XML). Third, the implementation of a new online submission system has improved efficiency and decreased the publication cycle time; preliminary results for JAMA show a 40% reduction in the time from receipt to rejection, a 33% reduction in the time from receipt to acceptance, and, perhaps most important for the bottom line, a 50% reduction in postage costs. The final piece of the systems-workflow overhaul will be to streamline workflow and implement an end-to-end content-management system during 2006.

A clear content-management system can both speed up the production cycle and reduce errors while making it easier to repurpose information, particularly for online use. At the University of Chicago Press, a single standard generalized markup language (SGML) process running throughout the publication cycle

offers speed, control, parallel publishing to multiple media, and reuse of content. Automation of the submission process and of basic document structuring frees staff time for deeper content editing. Editorial programs are customized for each publication, and copyeditors are given intense training in editorial style and the editing tools for at least 6 months. That training is supported by a remote-access architecture so that, if copyeditors choose to leave the company, they can continue to work on a freelance basis.

With many publications now offering online editions and archives, incorporating Web coding into the production process has become crucial. Building standard languages, such as SGML and XML, into the production cycle at the earliest point possible allows more flexibility in proofing and editing at every point from submission to archiving. Documents may be revised and reused at any time with minimal effort. In the books market, electronic formatting and archiving also have resulted in a decrease in the size of print runs in favor of electronic storage and short-run printing. Printing on demand reduces storage costs, helps keep books in print longer, and allows cost-effective publishing of ultra-special-interest books in new markets.

Editorial workflow needs are constantly shifting, and no system will last forever. Every process should allow for flexibility and updating. Sometimes a few tweaks of the system will take care of things, but sometimes a complete reinvention is necessary. Each publication system is unique, and every workflow different. "There is no single solution", said John Muenning, University of Chicago Press. "Things change." 