

Web Searching, Accessibility, and Content

Moderator:

Monica Mungle

JAMA and Archives Journals
Chicago, Illinois

Speakers:

Dominic Mitchell

BMJ Publishing Group
London, United Kingdom

Eric Gamazon

University of Chicago Press
Chicago, Illinois

Richard W Newman

JAMA and Archives Journals
Chicago, Illinois

Reporter:

Lynelle Korte

Elsevier
St Louis, Missouri

"The role of publishing has changed from guardian to gateway." That comment by Dominic Mitchell, Web administrator for the BMJ Publishing Group, captured the essence of the discussion of "Web Searching, Accessibility, and Content" at the CSE 49th annual meeting.

The needs of users are paramount in online offerings, Mitchell explained as he described the evolution of BMJ online publications from content-driven to customer-driven. It is no longer about publishers' being able to add content; instead, it is about creating a useful and value-added experience. Through continuing analysis, the BMJ team discovered that users want clear, accessible information; perpetual access; and flexible access models.

In addition, users prefer quick synopses of material rather than full-length or added-length content. Clear layouts with clean codes and readable fonts are impor-

tant, especially if the information may be used on PDAs or for quick reading access. It has been shown that people read differently online, following an "F" pattern rather than the traditional left-to-right, top-to-bottom print approach. Finally, digital content must be available at all times and easy to find.

When Google started crawling the *BMJ* Web site and including its content in search results, a noticeable increase in the number of page views and unique visitors occurred. As Mitchell pointed out, people were getting the search results and then entering the site and downloading material. However, they were not remaining on the site. Instead, users come, get what they want, and then leave. As the common saying goes, "Every page is a home page."

Google may be the most prominent search engine for this audience with Google Scholar and Google Books, but many digital initiatives are offered throughout the world. Windows Live, Europe's Information Society Thematic Portal, CrossRef.org, Open Content Alliance, PubMed Central, and JSTOR are a few additional initiatives mentioned by Eric Gamazon, of University of Chicago Press.

According to Gamazon, current concerns about Google include its commercial status, its proprietary ranking algorithm, the lack of sorting options, and flaws in citation analysis and functionality. The question remains whether Google can truly support a worldwide community of users and developers with different and possibly conflicting needs and requirements. For now, Google is the top referer to University of Chicago Press online content. "Users are definitely discovering our content through Google", Gamazon said. "We need to figure out how to adapt or respond."

Possibilities for responding to that trend include collaborating with Google by exchanging metadata to ensure accurate citations and proper linking, partnering in development of ongoing metadata standards, and obtaining use reports from Google.

Another aspect of the Google relationship involves advertising. Richard W Newman, journal sales and online business director at *JAMA* and *Archives Journals*, said, "Google is insinuating itself deeper into the business side of the journals market through AdSense, a service that matches ads to the keywords on an e-journal page." Taking targeting even further, an option for consideration may be the inclusion of ads in exchange for free content.

Whether in partnership with Google or considering the publication's own advertising sales opportunities, Newman advised editors, "Don't underestimate your readers so that you miss out on this revenue source—but maintain your ethical standards." He recommended the guidelines posted by the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors at www.icmje.org as a good example to follow. However, Newman doesn't expect a sea change in the near future: "I think the last place it's going to change is in the top-tier medical journals."

Although online advertising is just beginning to take hold, advanced searching and targeting functionality is leading the evolution of traditional issue-based print publishing to a single-article online economy. To succeed in the new environment and meet the needs of increasingly savvy users, publications need to make more versions of more content available, readable, and accessible. 