

## Choosing and Changing Publishing Vendors

*Moderator:*

**Dana Compton**

*Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*

Washington, DC

*Speakers:*

**John Hawley**

*American Society for Clinical Investigation*

Ann Arbor, Michigan

**George Kendall**

*Anesthesiology*

Winston-Salem, North Carolina

**Frank Stumpf**

*Independent Consultant*

Richmond, Virginia

*Reporter:*

**Kelly Hadsell**

*American Association for Cancer Research*

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

This session provided insights into making vendor transitions: moving from a commercial publisher to self-publishing, moving from self-publishing to a commercial publisher, and considering transition issues from a vendor's perspective.

John Hawley, executive director of the *Journal of Clinical Investigation*, discussed changes in the publishing industry that caused his association to review its publishing procedures; it ultimately decided to move from a commercial publisher to self-publishing. That decision was based on various factors, including increasing control over journal operations and the financial return to the association. The transition took about 10 months to complete. Major transition tasks included formalizing staff needs and training, addressing physical-plant issues, taking printer bids,

and conducting "dry runs" for production and editing tasks. Hawley noted several unanticipated issues that arose after the transition. Startup costs were lower than estimated. The use of freelance copyeditors did not work out as well as hoped, so copyediting was moved in house, and this led to increased salary costs. The use of SGML coding was another issue: it required more time and attention than originally thought. The number of journal subscriptions declined after the transition. Although Hawley does not believe that this was a direct result of the transition, he reminded the group that subscription numbers are not constant and can change at any time.

George Kendall and his former employer transitioned from self-publishing to working with a commercial publisher. Anticipated benefits included reduction of production and editorial costs, concentrated marketing, royalties, and advertising sales. Kendall recommends that anyone considering working with a commercial publisher prepare a strong request for proposal (RFP), which should include a transition timeline, the history of the journal or society and its organizational structure and workflow, and an outline of journal-related finances so candidate vendors can offer fair proposals based on costs. Once proposals are received, ask the following questions: Does the proposal address all questions asked in the RFP? Does the vendor appear to be looking forward? What competitor titles does the vendor publish? Is there a firewall between competing titles? How long has the current CEO been in place? Has the company undergone any recent mergers or acquisitions?

Save some tough questions for the live vendor presentation. The presentation is a good way to get a feel for the vendor. Note whom the vendor brings to the presentation (staff who will be working directly on your journal?) and how the vendor inter-

acts with you and your colleagues. Kendall also suggests a careful review by legal teams on both sides once contracts are ready to be signed.

To ensure a successful transition, build a timeline for transition of processes and maintain open communication among all parties involved. After the transition, hold the vendor accountable for timelines and quality.

Frank Stumpf, who has many years of experience with print and composition vendors, such as Cadmus and SPi, discussed transitions from a vendor's perspective. To ensure a successful partnership between vendor and client, clients should be as specific as possible in stating needs and expectations and should provide clear, well-defined specifications. Stumpf also believes that a strong RFP and service-level agreement can lead to a successful client-vendor relationship. Clients should ask tough questions during the RFP process and should visit the service provider's office and observe the environment and processes. He also recommends considering document clarity, flexibility, teamwork, and communication when selecting a vendor. A service-level agreement should outline requirements, expectations, and measurements and should clearly define processes, costs, and a disaster recovery plan.

Most publishers will make a decision to change or not to change publishing partners or vendors at some point, but the three speakers agreed that the decision is not "one size fits all" and that it depends on the needs and size of the journal or institution. 