

Course Check: Three open access publishers on the challenges of sustainability

A follow-up to the SPARC-ACRL Forum on Emerging Issues in Scholarly Communication, June 2007

INTERVIEW III:

Paul Peters
Head of Business Development, Hindawi Publishing Corporation

June 23, 2007

The three interviews in this series were conducted by Alma Swan of Key Perspectives Ltd., for SPARC and ACRL, with executives from three leading open access publishers: Mark Patterson, director of publishing for the Public Library of Science; Bryan Vickery, deputy publisher for BioMed Central; and Paul Peters, director of business development for Hindawi Publishing Corporation. Additional materials are available at www.arl.org/sparc/meetings/ala07.

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Interview III – PAUL PETERS, Hindawi Publishing Corporation – June 23, 2007

ALMA: What is the current role of print subscriptions in your business model? And how much does that contribute to the sustainability of your business? And where do you see that going?

PAUL: Well, currently we receive pretty substantial print revenue from a number of our journals, but they are unique. They're popular subscription-based journals that we converted to open access, so they already had existing subscribers. However, you will certainly see a decrease in the number of print journals in the next couple of years as we continue to make them open access. We don't really see print as being integral to the financial health of our journals in the future. More likely, print will be used in the next three or four years for marketing purposes and to reassure authors about the seriousness of journals. But in terms of a sustainable revenue stream, we don't really see print as an important part of our business.

ALMA: The issue of moving money around from subscriptions to article processing fees worries librarians. Can you say what you think is happening at the moment? How do you think that money might move or may the article processing fees come from other sources in the institution? What's your experience with this?

PAUL: In our experience, from what we can tell, authors are paying their publication fees primarily from their research budgets. They are not taking money from their institutes. They're not taking money from their libraries. And in the most reasonably, well-funded areas of STM publishing, this will continue to be the case. There may be a role for institutional-level support in areas where there isn't grant funding for research, but that needs to be done very carefully. The role that libraries play in paying article processing charges can serve an important function for these poorly funded researchers, but this can also distort the market if there isn't a good mechanism in place for judging the value that is associated with various journals.

ALMA: You're seeing in rise in submissions. You reported recently that you've seen a 70 percent rise in submissions over the last year for Hindawi journals overall. That's good news. Do you know precisely why authors are flocking to you like this?

PAUL: It's a number of factors. Some of it is due to the new journals that we've been launching. I would say a reasonable fraction of the submissions that we get now are coming from journals that are only one to two years old. So that does account for a lot of the growth. But our established journals are also doing very well. And I think that's mainly because of the focus that we've put on author services, and providing a very rich experience from submission until final publication that other competing publishers aren't providing. And so, in that way, we get very positive feedback from our authors, and we have a lot of repeat authors that keep coming back. Our strategy has been to be a service provider, which is what we believe open access publishing really is about. So I think we've been able to attract a lot of authors recently because we focus on service.

ALMA: Does Hindawi have a policy on supporting data? Do you encourage your authors to submit the data as well and publish it alongside the papers?

PAUL: In specific journals where there's an accepted standard or database that's used for data, we will require, in certain cases, authors to deposit in those places. We allow authors to submit any supplementary files they want, whether they're movie images, audio files, or data sets, but at this stage we haven't seen a lot of authors flocking to submit supplementary files. And that's something I think may progress in the future, as we start seeing more creative uses of the data. But at this point, authors don't seem to be submitting data for publication on our Web site as much as one might expect.

ALMA: But funders may have a role in increasing that?

PAUL: Yes. Certainly there would be a role, but, again, I think that more centralized databases are going to be the natural place for this as opposed to publishers' Web sites because the functionality really increases once it's all in a centralized database.

ALMA: And finally, I wonder if you might say a few words about the basis for charging your authors. There are two ways of charging. At the moment, you're charging them essentially an article processing fee, because you're only charging once you've accepted a paper that has been peer reviewed. But there is an alternative, which is to charge right at the very front of the process, a charge for the peer review service, effectively. You've opted for the first one at the moment. Do you see that changing or are you going to stick with that, and why?

PAUL: In terms of submission fees, it's a difficult issue. I think there are advantages to charging submission fees. They will reduce the burden on the current peer review process by making authors have more realistic goals about where they're submitting their articles. But in terms of practical implementation, I think it's very difficult. If you are the only publisher charging submission fees, that puts your journals at a huge disadvantage. So that's one reason why I don't see it working very well, at least not in the near future. In addition, looking at Hindawi in particular, we would only be able to reduce the fees, but we couldn't fully shift to a submission fee-based system because the vast majority of our costs come after the acceptance of an article. The peer review cost, if I were to guess, is probably only about 20 or 30 percent of our overall cost as a company because we do very extensive production work and additional things after publication, and that's where a lot of the cost lies. You would only really be able to deflect a small amount of the cost by having submission fees. So we don't really see that as a good option at this point.

ALMA: Thank you very much, Paul.

PAUL: Thank you.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]