

Aries Industry Advisory Board



Date: December 4, 2020

Time: 9:00am – 1:30pm

Location: Zoom

Attendees:

Aries: Jennifer Fleet, Brianna Bowen, Greg Gake, Betsy Hopkins, Kate Horgan

Industry: PLOS, Thieme, ASCE, T&F, Wiley, IEEE, Springer Nature, UCP, de Gruyter, World Scientific, Wolters Kluwer, New England Journal of Medicine, Ithaca S+R, APA, Cell Press, American Chemical Society

The meeting commenced at 9:01am US-Eastern. Jennifer Fleet, Managing Director – Aries Systems welcomed the Board, thanking them for their participation in the virtual meeting of the AIAB. The Board did not meet in June due to the pandemic, but we are pleased with the near perfect attendance at this virtual meeting.

Jennifer began with an introduction of Aries staff and Board attendees, along with personal goals for the meeting. Common themes included connections within the industry, interest in the impacts of the pandemic, and learning about the Aries roadmap.

Jennifer provided a recap of the December 2019 meeting and key items for follow-up from the Aries team:

- China connectivity progress
- UI/UX progress
- Updates on the SOC 3 audit

Jennifer addressed these items in her presentations (see further information below).

Jennifer then reviewed the Ground Rules for the Board and the meeting, including legal guidance and participant guidelines, followed by a review of the Guiding Principles established between Elsevier and Aries.

Next followed an Aries Business Update covering the following topics:

- Business in 2020
 - Aries has had a successful year with 8,400 live publications using Editorial Manager (EM)
 - Submissions are up year-over-year, not just due to increased COVID-related submissions
 - All goals associated with the acquisition have been met
 - Aries is exploring opportunities to share Elsevier technology with other clients
- Staff changes
 - Aries has hired a new Quality Manager (Greg Gake) and Director of Marketing (Brianna Bowen)
 - Tony Alves is no longer with Aries, and Aries wishes him well in his next endeavors. Jennifer is actively interviewing for a new Director of Product Management and hopes to have a candidate selected by the end of December.
- Aries during the COVID-19 pandemic
 - The Aries offices closed March 16, 2020 shifting all employees to fully remote. The infrastructure has been able to support all 97 employees working remotely with no issues.

- The offices re-opened with 25% capacity as of June 15.
- The staff meets quarterly for organizational updates, with each department meeting regularly, including social times like “coffee breaks” and “team trivia”.
- China Experience
 - Over the past year we have seen a dramatic increase in the number of page views coming from China, with China now representing 25% of our daily traffic.
 - Higher volumes increasingly result in slower response times in afternoon in China due to “great firewall” saturation.
 - Aries is working on a number of infrastructure-related initiatives to try and alleviate these issues.
- SOC Certification
 - When the Board last met, they asked for Aries to provide the SOC Audit report. The prior report is available on our website (https://www.ariessys.com/wp-content/uploads/LexisNexis-_Aries_-2019-Type-1-SOC-3-Report.pdf).
 - SOC3 process has been put on hold as we are working remote, but work will resume in 2021.
- Audits and Security
 - We have undergone both an accessibility audit on EM/PM and a security audit of our physical space.
 - As a result of the accessibility audit, we are working on developing accessibility champions within key departments (starting with UI/UX and Product, moving to Quality and Engineering next).
 - As a result of the security audit, we are installing security cameras and taking stronger security steps at our offices in North Andover, MA.
- Development Process
 - Following the full deployment of v17.0, Aries will begin rolling out features via monthly releases rather than the “big bang” releases of the past.
 - Goal is to roll features out to clients as soon as they are available, and to minimize the impact to clients when new features are deployed.
 - In support of this, we are aligning our development teams with product components, encouraging more “ownership” in all parts of the development process.

Additional conversations included:

- Increased traffic in 2020 and whether it is attributable to the “COVID spike” and if so, specifically from China, or from an increased client base. Though that type of information is unavailable, anecdotal evidence suggests a general “COVID spike”.

Board attendees suggested or requested the following:

- Aries should invest in infrastructure enhancements to support researchers.
- Discuss accessibility training process and next steps as a result of the training.
- Provide high-level overview of disaster recovery, redundancy, and technical infrastructure in place.

Greg Gake, Quality Engineering Manager at Aries, presented on areas of improvement he has focused on in the Quality Department:

- Greg introduced himself, having just joined Aries in July of 2020, and having 30 years of experience in development and quality.

- The team at Aries are dedicated to improving the quality of EM by improving processes.
- The two key initiative areas are:
 - Testing efficiencies, such as standardizing current industry tools, increasing automated testing over manual testing, and identifying key customer workflow areas
 - People reinforcement, such as pairing product testing experts with automation testing experts, embedding QEs with Engineering teams, and expanding the team
- These initiatives are already showing dividends with the number of bugs trending down over the past few months.
- Further to the above, Aries has instituted a development freeze with a clear quality gate defined before development can resume.

Additional conversations included:

- Speed and page performance testing will become part of the automation that is being developed, though currently those metrics are provided by Aries' Operations team from their monitoring tools.

Jennifer continued the meeting with the Development Roadmap and Strategic Initiatives:

- Development focus is around three elements: innovation, integrations, and enhancements.
 - Innovations include our ongoing LiXuid workflow
 - Integrations include developing APIs with systems outside of EM
 - Enhancements improve the usability and utility of the system
- Key initiatives for Aries are:
 - OA Switchboard: An OASPA initiative, Aries was an early sponsor of this with Jennifer on the Advisory Board. Pilot integration is underway with Microbiology Society. More information will be presented at the next AIAB meeting.
 - UI/UX updates: Aries has hired a dedicated UI/UX designer. He has already started work on a strategic and organized, comprehensive style guide for Aries assets and works closely with Product to ensure alignment. The first three UI/UX updates being worked on are refreshing the Navigation Bar, refreshing the Main Menus, and revising the Reviewer Invitation pages.
- Version 17.0, which is currently in beta testing, encompasses the three development elements in the following features:
 - Innovations: LiXuid Development continues with the introduction of XML Workflow via production tasks, including an integrated editing tool, and an auto-pagination tool being released in 2021.
 - Integrations: Repository integrations via API, Manuscript Evaluation tools via API, Convey API, and WeChat API.
 - Enhancements: Key enhancements include Search Submission from the Navigation Bar, batch assignments for Editors and tasks, and batch configurations for Article Types.
- Beyond version 17.0, Aries is investigating such things as:
 - Reviewer Locator Service
 - Ingest invited submissions capability
 - Collaboration with Elsevier to introduce integration of tools into EM

Additional discussion included:

- Identification mechanism for data deposits: URL, through persistent DOI of sorts is also possible.

- General APIs including people data for reporting. Some clients have used the API on a limited basis with Data Salon.
- We have been asked to explore a more robust integration allowing for more people data however, it is not currently on our roadmap. Additional API requests will be investigated by Aries as they are requested

Kate Horgan led a facilitated discussion around the impacts of COVID-19:

- Since the March timeframe, Aries staff began working from home. Aries began identifying ways to support our clients as they adapted as well:
 - Provide free sites for dedicated COVID-19 research
 - Bulk workflow changes for changing needs
 - Assist in messaging and system changes to accommodate process changes
- Submission volumes increased significantly in Q2 2020. Factors are not just around COVID-19 research, but the non-medical impacts as well. Increased volume also reflected topics related to racial just issues as well.
- In general, challenges included:
 - The need to adapt to quicker turn-around times
 - Difficulty in finding reviewers for the increased submissions
 - Strains on human processing to accommodate the changes

Kate then led facilitated discussion with the board as a whole on the following topic areas:

- Preprint servers – expanding interest in having submissions go to preprint simultaneous to submission to journals, or somehow incorporated into the workflow.
- Requests and challenges around recording and reporting on diversity, ethnicity, and inclusion of authors, reviewers. Legal aspects need to be considered as this leads to questions on data usage, storage, retention.
- Reviewer and Editor engagement: some areas have had larger reviewer availability; some areas are lower reviewer availability. As submissions continue to come at higher volumes, the reviewer resources are not as available. Some attendees have used the change in working to inform ways to streamline processes.
- Moving Editorial Manager to the Cloud is a project we are starting to undertake. Concerns raised were mostly around data retention rules.
- Concerns were raised around our integration with WeChat. Jennifer clarified that clients would be setting agreements directly with Charlesworth, who will be licensing their WeChat gateway to Aries customers. This direct relationship will allow clients to initiate use of the integration based on their own comfort level.
- With the new UI/UX resource, will Aries be revisiting the mobile usage of EM? Further exploration can be added to the UI/UX backlog.

Roger Shoenfeld of Ithaka led a facilitated discussion on the Year of Data in review. Roger identified four ways of looking at data:

- Funder: Open Data Mandates
- Institution: Try to be compliant and supportive of open data mandates though not always fully understanding policies and regulations
- Publishers: Connecting publications to the supporting data. FAIR (findable, accessible, interoperable, and reusable) principles are becoming common, though COAR (Confederation of Open Access Repositories) are discontent with the efforts.

- Researchers: Sharing data with colleagues via coherent communities

The meeting then transitioned to facilitated discussion with the board as a whole on the following topic areas:

- Data availability standardization: human subject research data is different from other data sets and often is more susceptible to legal and intellectual property issues.
- Data repositories and digital preservation: the need to use open repositories is growing, but the risk is that those repositories might close down if they lose funding.
- Research behavior: publishers should think more about developing systems to make data access easier rather than force requirements on researchers that make it more difficult for them.
- Data in the workflow: should data sets be part of an initial submission to be part of peer review? General views are that the data sets should not be added but enabling API calls from EM to repositories will be beneficial.

The meeting concluded with the following wrap up and action items for Aries staff:

- Cover the following topics at the next meeting:
 - Discuss Accessibility Training, progress, and best practices being implemented as a result
 - Discuss Aries' Disaster Recovery / Business Continuity plans
- Distribute the Aries tech overview to the Board
- Explore integration with Data Salon and Snowflake
- Announce plans for next meeting when available

Meeting concluded around 1:15pm US-Eastern.