Simon Inger Consulting

Workflow Implications of Open Access Publishing

A White Paper from Simon Inger Consulting

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INTRODUCTION

The gradual transition of journal publishing from subscription products to open access, which is more an author services model, brings with it some necessary and sometimes unforeseen changes in editorial and production workflow. This brief white paper is assembled from a range of such changes either actioned or envisioned by publishers for which SIC has consulted.

APC COLLECTION

The collection of APCs is an entirely new function to many publishers. At the moment, for many, volumes are low and a mostly manual system for payment is sufficient. For some publishers, such as those who still charge authors for page or colour charges, there are mechanisms in place, sometimes with their composition partners, for the taking of APCs.

However, APCs are already becoming a more complex entity to handle, with many publishers offering differential rates on APCs depending on the author's location, an array of OA membership plans, and in many cases the need to bill someone other than the author, such as a funding agency or institution, in the author's stead. Another complication in Europe is the application of VAT to any APCs, and the issuing of proper VAT invoices so that properly registered entities can reclaim the tax in their own country.

The need for the publisher to remain agile in this regard will be key, and a number of service providers have emerged to help in this complicated matter and provide proper audit, tax and currency conversion services from the outset. Some of these services are fully integrated with editorial software and have the potential to save considerably on staff time and effort, as well as provide a better customer experience.

As volumes increase, publishers will need to have highly streamlined APC collection if it is not to become a major part of the cost of providing a gold open access solution.

EDITORS

Many new open access titles have much broader scopes than their contemporary subscription journals, and to maintain a broad range of subject expertise amongst editors requires a new approach to managing editors. For large-scale broad titles, an extensive array of appointed editors is a suitable solution, but for broad yet smaller publications, an area under investigation is the set-up of a more dynamic editorial board.

In such a model, the publisher needs tools to more rapidly select and manage editorial boards, such as the ability for the editorial software to suggest an editor and indeed subsequently find reviewers in unfamiliar areas.

CASCADING

Many publishers have recently launched new open access journals with the primary purpose of accepting some percentage of the articles rejected by a publisher's flagship titles.

Publishers have experimented with a number of options to support this cascade. One is to ask at the time of submission whether or not, in the case of rejection, the author would accept being cascaded to another title. While this offers maximum author convenience and speed, some worry that authors will perceive it more likely that their paper will be destined for the lower impact title. More acceptable, perhaps, is to automate an invitation to cascade the article upon initial rejection. An email can include an embedded "yes or no" checkbox for the author to decide if they are willing for the article to be cascaded.

The critical part for the publisher's back-office is the automatic resubmission of the article to its new destination journal, carrying with it all the metadata and optionally reviewer feedback, so that the author has no new tasks to perform, and the publisher has no complicated or convoluted series of tasks to perform. The reviewers will need to give their permission for their reviews to be cascaded too, and automating this process significantly expedites publication. Some publishers are additionally experimenting with having overlapping editorial boards, so that an editor cascading an article to another journal has the authority to accept it in its new destination.

THE AUTHOR AS PRIMARY CUSTOMER

In the world of open access, the primary client is the author – more so than ever before. Good author experience and author service is part of the key to future submissions, and there are steps that publishers can take in configuring their editorial workflows which improve the author experience without compromising any aspect of peer review.

One part of this is to make article submission as easy as possible. For some authors, gathering all the necessary information, especially about their co-authors, can be extremely time-consuming. Publishers have to work to simplify this task and remove some of the pain associated with article submission, and make the repetitive tasks like file submission intuitive. Can the editorial system be configured to capture minimal

information on initial submission and then more detailed information on revision?

COPYRIGHT

The changing nature of copyright in open access articles presents some intriguing workflow challenges. It is becoming increasingly expected that the appropriate copyright statement is carried at the article level in PDFs and properly tagged within the XML. Document delivery and reprint organizations need to see in the XML the appropriate copyright notice, all the better if the notice for open access articles is in a standard form such as a Creative Commons license. This will determine the document delivery or reprint fee. It will also determine what third parties are allowed to do with each article, including long-term archival.

Authors are still somewhat confused by the differences in the range of Creative Commons licenses, and also confused about what their funding agency may have mandated. The ability to prompt authors at the time of article submission, and present the appropriate license linked to funding agency policy, should prove advantageous.

A recent problem to emerge is the retrospective payment of open access fees, thus changing the provisions of copyright when the article is already in the public domain and potentially already in a national library archive. Since the copyright notice needs to change in the PDF, and in the XML, does this change the version of record, or create a new "edition" of the article? In either case, publishers need a new workflow to deal with these retrospective changes, and reload the articles to their delivery platforms and their trading partners.

APC COMPETITION AND COST COMPETITION

No one is certain yet as to what extent any significant cost competition will exist for APCs. Will low APCs become synonymous with poor quality service or good value for money? Will higher APCs be the sign of good quality and exclusivity or poor cost control? Providing Gold Open Access turns the business of journal publishing from a product business into a service business where the primary customer is the author. Many businesses provide surplus value to their clients, a series of value-adds that aren't perceived by customers as having as much value as they cost. A common example of this is copyediting, which while improving products in the eye of the publisher, doesn't seem to be perceived as adding all that much value to the average author. Some are considering making copyediting an author choice at the time of submission and branching the workflow appropriately post-acceptance.

In SIC's experience, most publishers spend similar amounts per article on manuscript tracking and peer review, delivery platform, and editorial staff costs. The major differences are in the levels and cost of copyediting, and the costs incurred in composition. Complicated workflows, author proofing arrangements, and embargoes on articles to coincide with press coverage seem to be some major contributors to high composition costs. Cost control may ultimately lead to the need to simplify workflows.

Whatever the outcome on APCs, to maximize profits or surpluses, or even to stay in business, publishers will need to be on top of the cost of every element of its workflow and fully understand the benefits and costs of every addition to it. In the old subscription world such additions could be paid for from raising prices or selling more product. That luxury is gone. In editorial workflow, an increasing array of publisher tools seems to point the way to more cost efficiencies through automated reminders, reference checking and checks on duplicate submissions.

REMAINING AGILE

It's a brave person who claims to know the shape of open access in five years or even three. Open access is still evolving and publishers need to remain agile in their ability to change workflows. Hand in hand with this way of thinking is the need for systems that are quickly reconfigurable, so that publishers can easily try and retry new approaches to workflow without incurring high costs in their experimentation.

CONCLUSION

Publishers will need to remain highly adaptable as their businesses transition to Gold Open Access. The provision of Gold Open Access transitions journals publishing from a business model where subscription sales are as important as gaining the best authors, to one where the author is the dominant stakeholder. Publishers who are able to offer the highest levels of author service to make the author's life easier, and those who adapt quickly, should be able to gain a competitive advantage.

ABOUT SIMON INGER CONSULTING

Simon Inger Consulting is a long-established consultancy service to publishers, libraries, technology providers and intermediaries in the scholarly publishing arena. Simon Inger has been involved in scholarly publishing for over twenty-five years and has been a consultant since 2002.

Simon has worked in the subscription agency world; has been closely involved in library technology solutions and standards-making; was a co-founder and managing director of CatchWord, the first e-journal platform provider; and has provided consultancy to commercial and not-for-profit publishers, large and small, and intermediaries of all descriptions in the information chain. In addition, under the brand of Renew Training, Simon is a co-trainer on a number of courses run in association with UKSG and ALPSP for librarians and publishers.

With a technological background, strong inventive and analytical streaks, combined with a keen eye for business, and years of experience in the scholarly information arena, Simon Inger provides his clients with solutions to major strategic issues, portfolio development, platform and systems selection, pricing and business model changes, and a wide range of other consultancy projects.