
Drinking From the Firehose — It's Never Too Late: 10 New Year's Resolutions to Suggest to Publishers of E-journals

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In this column I would like to suggest some New Year's resolutions for publishers of e-journals. If I hadn't been so busy linking up new e-journals I could have written this column in time for the *ATG* issue that came out in January, hence making the New Year's Resolution theme a bit timelier. But

what the heck, it's never too late to make a resolution to improve something, right?

So here are my top 10 New Year's resolutions for publishers of e-journals:

1. Send/post/display lists of titles in true alphabetical order. This seems like a no-

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brainer, but again and again I receive or view lists of e-journal titles in all kinds of *not* alpha order. I recently received a spreadsheet of titles from a large publisher and the list was in order by some code that I never would never, ever use. The result was a list in “semi” alpha order but just not enough to be very irritating. It was easy enough to re-sort the list for my personal preference, but why on earth would they send it this way? There are several major e-journal publishers who have had trouble with initial articles. That is, filing titles under “The.” Didn’t we solve this problem years ago? And one of them amazingly explained this failing this way: Well, we are trying to accommodate our non-English speaking clients. So does that mean that we too should coddle our English-speaking audience and use initial articles in other languages to confuse things? I think not. That excuse was a cop-out. Thankfully, this publisher must have realized how silly this practice was, and doesn’t do this anymore — if nothing else, such a practice is insulting. We still find subscription vendors who sort later words in a title in a somewhat loose fashion — for example, “Journal of the” and “Journal for the” may not sort perfectly, since their systems may drop all the words between “Journal” and then skip to the next major word. Serials people are used to this but frankly, if everyone would simply let the machine do the work and stop interfering with the order, we would really appreciate it!

2. Put your licenses on a diet. Twelve page licenses are ridiculous and you know it! Stop already! Please fire a couple of the lawyers and hire a couple of serials catalogers instead. The funny thing about these licenses is that the piracy publishers fear is never (or hardly ever) going to be at the hands of librarians, rather, it will be from sources not covered by the license. Pirates don’t care about the license restrictions and librarians will mostly bend over backwards to comply. We are way too rule-bound and honest to try to rip you off (see Resolution #1). There are continuing rumblings to change the license landscape and I am all for it — licensing is one of the biggest wastes of time in this environment — keep it simple and you will find more libraries signing up, and being happy about it!

3. Title changes matter. Even if you choose to put all the titles of a historical run on the same Web page, you need to acknowledge title changes. Please. Use OCLC or some bibliographic entity to document these — we didn’t catalog all these titles for nothing, you know. The information is there — please use it. There was a survey done recently by **Andrew Shoyer (UCLA)** canvassing catalogers to see if they thought that going back to “Latest Entry” cataloging for serials was feasible. “Latest Entry” means documenting all the title changes on one bibliographic record and “Successive Entry” means breaking each title into separate records. With AACR2, most of us went with “Successive Entry” and that’s what most libraries are using today. But with e-journals, “Latest Entry” is looking good again. Maybe we’ll do it — who knows. But in the meantime, we just want publishers to understand the concept.

4. If you sell the title to another publisher, we need to know — before the fact, not after the fact. This is really a big problem. We find e-journal titles all the time that stop working and end abruptly with no information about where the title has moved. You know who you sold the title to, so please tell us and give us someone to contact. Communication in this area needs vast improvement.

5. Give us (OUR) detailed coverage information up front and easy to find. We are often provided spreadsheets that tell us the year that our coverage starts, but then we have to go dig to find the exact volume and number. Please give us the detailed information in an easy to find place. This is especially necessary when the title changes in the middle of a volume (see #3). I had one publisher’s customer service person tell me, “Oh, your coverage starts pretty much always in 1996.” I pointed out to her that wasn’t the least bit true,

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6. Don’t overly complicate URLs. There is an editor of a certain journal devoted to kinesiology that required us to change the year of publication embedded in the URL every January. This was his way of controlling his subscription renewals! I am happy to report that he now understands why this is a problem for us. Publishers: Yours is NOT the only journal we are managing, and your universe is not the only one we care about.

7. Work with subscription agents. Subscription agents have been a tremendous aid in helping us manage our e-journal subscriptions. They can make sense of the mess you often make, and their billing systems work with our library accounting units. Don’t cut them out of the loop!

8. Don’t tie us to historical print subscription lists. Many of our e-journal packages are somehow tied to the print subscriptions we used to receive. In many cases, these are the titles for which we actually get billed — with everything else “thrown in” for good measure. It is probably time to stop this practice, as it simply makes no sense. After a couple of years of online-only usage data is collected, we should be able to build lists of online journals that are most relevant to our library without having to shoulder the burden of maintaining links to other journals that are never, or rarely used. Which leads to #9 ...

9. Give us consistent, logical use statistics. This is a topic we could discuss in a whole separate column, and it continues to be discussed everywhere. More and more, these statistics are going to be critical to our decisions about which journals we need to continue to subscribe, since the day will come, probably sooner rather than later, that we must face the hard cold truth that we can’t continue to subscribe to all of the titles that come in some of these humongous packages.

10. Be open to new pricing models. See #8. Also, we know that some publishers prefer working with consortia, while others are loathe to dealing with them. Regardless, we want fair, uncomplicated pricing models. This is another one of those topics that deserves far more discussion than I have time to devote here.

Now that I have all this off my chest, I feel a lot better. To be fair, there are a number of publishers who should receive kudos for either getting it right the first time or

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at least for having vastly improved their e-journal management and/or access. Since the “Worst Serial Title Change of the Year” Committee has been disbanded, perhaps instead we should be giving prizes (both complimen-

tary and booby) to publishers for their either fabulously easy to navigate or impossible to work with e-journal systems. Hmmmm, maybe this should be my next column!

I supposed I should also invite a publisher representative to guest write a column here on top ten complaints about librarians. I suspect we drive them crazy with all our quirky

demands, bizarre consortia arrangements, slow payment systems, etc. Yes, I am sure they could tell some tales on us librarians too. 

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