

Desperately Seeking Website

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I spoke with **Eric Albright**, Head of Acquisitions at **Duke University Medical Center Library**, and I realized our perspectives on the matter of online access are not so divergent. It is my hope that the paths of librarian and publisher can come together in more places than in print.

PUB: *In your opinion, what is the most difficult aspect of accessing online journals?*

LIB: Negotiating the license is usually the most difficult portion of this process. When we purchase print materials from our various publishers we know the restrictions, i.e. copyright and fair use, but that is not the case with a site license. Just as you have many customers with varying concerns we have various publishers each with different concerns which lead to the site licenses looking very different.

PUB: *What do you think publishers can do to change this?*

LIB: I offer either the adoption of mutually agreed upon model licenses or doing away with licenses altogether. What have either of us really gained from them?

PUB: *You suggest the adoption of mutually agreed upon model licenses for publishers or to do away with the site license altogether, but doesn't the site license offer protections/guarantees for the library customer as well? Shouldn't these needs be addressed in some medium (such as the site license)? I don't know how often you purchase online only subscriptions, but if you do, don't you need some kind of security that the product will be available and maintained for you?*

LIB: In the ideal world where we are full partners in the pursuit of academic endeavors, I would love it if we could do away with them altogether. Unfortunately, yes we do need simple agreements that say we agree to pay you and make it only available to certain IP

ranges and to follow copyright and you agree to deliver the product and ideally guarantee archival access. That takes but a page or two. Some licenses we see go on for many pages about liability, indemnification and prevailing court authority. When we subscribe to a print title, we have expectations that you will deliver the title and its content to us. But we have yet to sign an agreement with you stating that we expect you to maintain an editorial board of such and such caliber and have it delivered by the 13th of every month with X number of minimum pages on glossy paper. We can do that in print because there are accepted norms in the publishing industry which we and the courts would uphold. In this emerging electronic world those norms have yet to be established. I am not even certain that they ever will.

PUB: *What is favorable about electronic journals?*

LIB: As opposed to print? The obvious advantage for us is the link from our indexing sources directly to the article. Our patrons, like most of society, want instant satisfaction.

PUB: *Are you happy in general with the service you receive from publishers when subscribing to online journals?*

LIB: At the turn of the year when the subscription agents cause us to lose access to a journal, it is rather frustrating but in general we are happy. We also do not get clear information about when some of the larger sites are down or experiencing difficulties. The electronic environment requires more communication than the print because of enhanced expectations.

PUB: *How do the subscription agents cause you to lose your subscription/access? Is this because they do not make payment in a timely manner or because they are responsible for getting online access for your institution?*

LIB: We renew a title with the vendor but negotiate the site license with the publisher. Often it seems that the publisher cannot make the link from the vendor renewal request to our online account. It happens every renewal that we lose 2-10 journals, then have to contact the publishers to re-establish access.

PUB: *Would you like to see the print and online subscription process even more consolidated so that the subscription agents handle everything from payment of subscriptions to handling of site licenses?*

LIB: I hate giving up the authority but I like the idea of time saved. Of course, the ideal would be for you to throw the online access or print in for free. The future of subscription services is a difficult thing to predict. The large publishers could make it economically attractive to deal directly with them. In the short term, yes, I can see the agents doing this for us.

PUB: *In what ways do you see the online environment improving for library customers?*

LIB: I foresee that in the future the access points will likely be more standardized, in particular in regard to access from various citation indexes. Also I see handheld and wireless technology as potentially having a significant impact upon the future online environment in libraries.

You can ring me at (919) 620-0681 or email me at <amber@jbmr.org> if you would like to add to this discussion or suggest topics to address in future columns. 🌻