



Electronic journals

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This conference provides opportunities to share our successes, as well as our mutual problems, in this changing world. Some are more real than others, but the world-wide economic down-turn affects us all. Even in the best of times, dentists are not good readers and in the past years there has been a reduction of subscribers for most orthodontic journals. This is coupled with a reduction of advertising revenue now. Publishing costs are going up in most countries and the demand for color has accentuated the costs. Mailing costs are rising. The inflationary spiral affects all aspects of the publishing industry. Most orthodontic societies feel a publication of some sort is essential for communication with their members. Yet surveys show that a relatively small percentage reads their journals from cover to cover.

Despite the glowing prospects of electronic publication, with instant availability, a cloud of uncertainty hangs over the status of electronic editions. Most are an economic millstone around the society's necks. The hope is that ultimately the WEB editions will pay for themselves. Yet surveys show that the "hits" from potential readers is still disappointingly low for all electronic orthodontic editions. They are increasing, but not rapidly enough! This is in spite of the fact that electronic access is free for members and subscribers. Part of it is that transmission of color illustrations requires a lot of storage and more rapid transmission. More potential members need to update their computers, printers, etc. The recent shake-out of "dot.com" companies has not helped the hopes and aspirations of many journals, in all fields. Yet we are all convinced that communication is the name of the game and we want to "hang in there", if we can afford the mounting costs. But at what price?

Again, surveys show that there is an increase in color in professional journals, in spite of the cost factor and difficult control of quality in submissions

from prospective authors. *The Journal of Orthodontics* in Britain and the *World Journal of Orthodontics* are good examples of extensive use of color. Research validates the use of color, as readers prefer color, wherever possible, and communications experts have shown that the human brain clearly interprets color better and more rapidly than black and white illustrations. Color quality is improving in all journals, but electronic submission of color, the hope for the future, is often of insufficient quality and often require re-submission of higher resolution images from authors as well as electronic enhancement by the publisher. We need at least 300 d.p.i. resolution - and prefer 600 to 900! But then enormous storage and transmission are problems still in the electronic exchange. At present, we require the submission of high resolution images also by CD-Rom, although we will accept high resolution original figures. Not all journal publishers are able to process a potpourri of images and produce routine high quality figures. But progress is rapid and I am confident that this problem will be solved within 5 years, if journals can cope with the financial hemorrhage. Electronic submission of manuscripts is quite successful now, sans figures. Fortunately for us, Quintessence is the largest dental publisher in the world, with a tremendous commitment to textbook publication, too. Thus it is well equipped for the rapidly changing scene and is committed to producing top quality for the long haul.

Peer review of manuscript submissions is also rapidly changing as both manuscripts and figures can be sent via e-mail to referees and returned the same way. Much time is saved and so are shipping costs, counterbalancing the increases in color processing and mailing costs. A fine example of electronic handling of the important peer review process is Dr. Robert Isaacson's *Angle Orthodontist*. Some referees are not yet geared up to the electronic age yet, so



recourse to "snail mail" is still the only alternative. But I am confident that this will improve, too. Both time and money are saved with electronic peer review.

After working for 30 years with the *American Journal of Orthodontics*, before assuming the *WJO* editorship (10 years helping Dr. B. F. Dewel when he was editor, 5 years as Abstracts and Reviews Editor and 15 years as Editor in chief) I have learned a lot through mistakes, as well as successes. Editors must be personally involved in reading manuscripts and making editorial changes as needed. Only they have the overall picture of the mission of their journal. Too many editors delegate to their editorial assistants and serve primarily as facilitators. On the state and local level, this may work, where the bulk of the material concentrates on local news, social events and meetings. Here, electronic handling of news and events will be the wave of the future for them, as members come up to speed on their e-mail. And this may still be the best way to handle local and state journals. But the Continuing Education needs and demands for national specialty journals operate at a higher level. The dubious distinction and ego inflation of being editor quickly evaporates in a pile of manuscripts from ambitious young faculty submissions and master's theses from the "publish or perish" segment of our orthodontic specialty. It is difficult to be all-serving to all people for a journal. My own feeling is that official journals of societies have a broader responsibility to both academic and clinical members, to university faculty. But then, reader review of printed manuscripts suffers from the clinically oriented members. I know this from my own experience as *AJO-DO* editor, trying to satisfy all segments of our readership.

The *World Journal of Orthodontics* is unabashedly committed to the best possible clinical articles, by world class authors, for that clinical segment of our specialty, for the busy practitioner who needs and wants exposure to the latest and best in the most reader-friendly way - copious color. We strive for this objective. We have an excellent cadre of referees, a prestigious Editorial Board, and dedicated Sectional Editors that are second to none. I developed the subject oriented Referee Panel when I was Editor of the *AJO-DO* and have updated it constantly to be sure of optimal quality of publications. We have a certain amount of statistical validation, as needed, but put

extensive tables and charts on our WEB edition, for those who want the minutiae.

We don't see ourselves in competition with other journals, and, indeed, offer our help to others in any way we can assist. We constantly refer would-be authors to other journals that are better targets for their material than our clinician-oriented readership. This editorial teamwork serves our beloved specialty of orthodontics and I hope all editors see their mission to help one another the same way.

The miracle of electronic, e-mail communication makes the job easier for us all and I urge all editors to develop this to the highest level. Time consuming? You better believe it, if you do it right, communication with authors, editorial board members, referees, publishers. Much of this can be handled by the editor alone. I put in 4-6 hours a day, at least, on e-mail. An important objective for the *WJO* is to satisfy the clinical CE demands for the new millennium for all readers, subscribers and non-subscribers. A broad spectrum of coverage is our philosophy. Special sections by world-class authors are eagerly sought and read. "Ask an Expert" by Bjorn Zachrisson, "Tech Notes" by Larry White, "Orthodontics around the World" by Carla Evans, "Abstracts and Reviews" by Ahmet Keles, "VIP Interviews" by Samir Bishara are exceedingly well read! So is our World news section and listing of up-coming international meetings. We encourage electronic exchange between authors and readers. Each author must provide their e-mail addresses and agree to answer queries from readers. Reprints are available for all who request them, for a nominal fee. The preponderance of color, of course, makes the cost greater. We are exploring advertising on the WEB edition of the *WJO*, but with the uniform failure of producing revenue in almost all other fields, little financial return can be expected, to justify the time and effort.

Naturally, I worry about the recent shakeout of some orthodontic journals, some closing down, some being combined and bought out by other publishers. This is the way it is going in the publication field in general. Even venerable companies like Mosby have been bought out by Harcourt Brace, and then Elsevier Science, after 85 years of autonomy. I am in no way critical of these companies and wish them the best of luck. But some of this has to be unsettling. With the electronic publishing approach still not paying for



itself, what is the future?

Journals supported by society dues are in better financial condition than "stand-alone" journals. Despite publisher changes, for example, the *AJO-DO* is well supported by its member dues and can do whatever and whomever it wants to serve, not only its membership but subscribers from all around the world.

Again, we offer our help to any orthodontic journal who asks for it. We have already shared our subject-headed referee list with other journals. Editors are a great fraternity of dedicated orthodontists, working for a common cause, the continuing professional betterment of our colleagues and the best possible patient care. Stay the course!