



The digital editorial office: some experiences in the transition

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Like many other orthodontic journals, *The Angle Orthodontist* has found its way onto the Internet as an online publication. One important difference does exist, however. Commercial publishing houses publish most other orthodontic journals that are written by the profession. This usually means that the profit motive is paramount. The E. H. Angle Education and Research Foundation, Inc. that publishes *The Angle Orthodontist* is a non-profit organization. The net result of this is that our main mission is to communicate information. We cannot operate at a loss, but we have no stated mission to earn a profit. We are small and, lacking the organizational superstructure of a publishing house, we are nimble and able to change rapidly.

In January 2000 *The Angle Orthodontist* went online and today you are able to read the journal in its entirety from 1996 to the present on the Internet at no cost. This might sound like a noble (and perhaps naive) experiment, but this is how we think scientific information should be handled and we would like to keep it this way and as long as we can keep our revenue and expenses in balance. This is our intention.

Anyone who looks into the problems of libraries and professional publications today recognizes that an inflationary spiral in journal costs is creating a mounting problem for libraries and other consumers of professional journals. The move to electronic publications has impacted most journals and for some journals, especially those where the circulation is small, the question of eliminating the paper publication has been discussed. This probably is not in our near future, but the cost of publication of paper journals continues to rise regularly.

In order to stay competitive, and with the expectation that better service makes us more competitive, few months ago we decided to go online for the entire submission and review process. In our system the printer who prints and mails our journals recently offered a new service where they purchased and tailored a software package designed to facilitate the

submission and review process. In this system, the author enters the manuscript on the Internet and the review process is done totally on the Internet. The paper work that used to be done in the editorial office is now done totally online.

Under this system, an author goes to the website <http://angle.allentrack.net>, selects a password and signs in. The author enters the manuscript online at his/her computer and it is instantly available to me at the editorial office. I can assign reviewers, the program sends the reviewers a notice concerning the manuscript and the manuscript is instantly available to them for review. All of the previous mail services and express package services are redundant under this system. Theoretically, I could have a paper reviewed the same day it was submitted. The only delay in the process is the human factor of the time needed by the reviewer.

When the reviewers have entered their reviews online, the review instantly becomes available to the editorial office. While this is all happening, the author has the prerogative to enter the system and, while the reviews themselves will not be made known until the editorial office releases them, the author can track the progress of the process online. When the editorial office has received the reviews, the program sends an e-mail letter tailored by the editorial office informing the author of the disposition of the manuscript. It is important to note that the program can be tailored to the existing policies of the journal rather than the journal getting into a Procrustean bed. It is a user-friendly system.

If the reviews call for revision, the author can make the desired changes and re-enter the manuscript. The revised manuscript will instantly become available at the editorial office where either further review can occur or the manuscript is sent to the copy editors – all electronically. There is no need for this manuscript to have ever become a paper copy unless someone elects to print it out which is possible at any stage of the process.



It is important to have a good support system behind this process as questions do arise. The software is relatively fail-safe, but it can offer the computer neophyte some uncomfortable moments in execution. Like in the paper manuscript, the vast majority of the problems exist in the figures. Figures are often large digital packages and good resolution for printed pages requires the use of TIFF, EPS or PDF format. All authors are not familiar with or able to manage this. When necessary, we have the author send us hard copy that the printer scans for publication. While entering figures can be a difficult step at the manuscript submission level, it is no different from the problem than has always existed at the end of the paper review process when figures have to be converted to digital format for publication. The difference is that we now make the digital manuscript at the beginning of the process instead of at the end. At this point the manuscript is electronically sent to the copyeditors and, when the digital manuscript comes back from the copy editors, galley proofs are still made. These are still mailed to the author and the editor for final checks before the article is entered online. Our online publication proceeds paper publication. There is certainly good reason that, in the near future, the galley proof will not also be totally electronic. In a PDF format it will look exactly like the printed page will look.

The process has caused the editorial staff some distress in the transition, but no problems arose that could not be resolved with the help of the Allen Press personnel, Marisa Barlow, who is in charge of this

project. She has been easily accessible and fully knowledgeable.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of this change? The advantages clearly are much more rapid manuscript management, the authors can check on their manuscript's progress any time and it will greatly reduce time and cost of manuscripts in transit. It also greatly facilitates manuscript filing and nothing is ever lost. Like most electronic developments, it probably will not cut costs, but it will provide more value in information to the interested parties and it will provide it immediately. I am free to use expert reviewers from all over the world just as readily as somebody in my own university. The Internet is facilitating the globalization of orthodontic information and there is no question that this is the future of information transmission. The downside of this process, outside of the short-term problems of a conversion, are the need to get e-mail addresses for many persons and the difficulty and frustration that the small minority of the profession have not yet made the computer transition will feel. In contrast to some electronic developments in our lives, this one does not have to be a depersonalization, but rather can provide much better communication and even better service, which is our goal.

In the longer-range plan, this process will be totally compatible with posting scientific information with maximal speed. Most importantly, it will be another step toward the total digital library that will allow the user to move freely from journal to journal on the Internet facilitating the instant free exchange of scientific information all over the world.