

New Books Cover Cyberspace, Editing

**Scholarly Journals at the Crossroads:
A Subversive Proposal for Electronic
Publishing**

Ann Shumelda Okerson, James J O'Donnel,
editors. Washington DC: Office of Scientific
and Academic Publishing, Association of
Research Libraries: 1995. 242 pages. Soft-
cover \$20.

This book presents Internet discussion on both the theoretical and realized aspects of electronic publication of technical and scientific scholarly, esoteric (nontrade, no market) journals. It is a valuable information resource for librarians, archivists, and some publishers. Although most discussion—including the original proposal on which the text is based—centers on esoteric journals, the application of these ideas to other technical and scientific scholarly journals is occasionally mentioned.

The noncoercive but “subversive” proposal suggests that scholars make their preprints available publicly by anonymous ftp/http,

and then replace the preprint with the refereed reprints, which are archived and maintained for electronic access.

The actual text of the book is a collection of electronic discussions initiated to stimulate discussion among noted authorities in computer science, library science, and traditional and electronic publishing. Although this format is effective and substantive, by necessity it is frequently redundant: Earlier communications are repeated when responses are presented to preserve continuity of ideas.

The discussion of current electronic publishing technology includes specific details, as well as an overview of how the technology is being used. Frequent helpful references are made to online discussion list resources, and an occasional smattering of publishing software plugs is included as lagniappe.

The use of actual electronic communications as text presents an almost virtual dialogue between readers and those participating in the discourse. This form of discussion allows the editors to convey subtly the immediacy with which varied viewpoints can be presented, accessed, and used to stimulate alternative ideas.

Options for subscriber and browser models and a blueprint for user action and print publisher reaction are offered. The editors balance ideas about systems technology with the various economic, financing, and budgeting issues involved in restructuring to an electronic publishing format. Some specific strategic financial advice is also offered to publishers for remodeling their current funding structures to help recover costs from a newly incorporated electronic publication. Suggestions include using advance subsidies from author page charges, learned society dues and subsidies, university and library subsidies, and research publication grants. Additional suggestions are offered regarding costs, charges, and sundry production, marketing, and distribution figures in a variety of disciplines.

Several discussants propose how submissions may be processed, archived, indexed, and made available, and how subscribers can

be notified automatically of new submissions. The book includes some heated debate about providing centralized subject-coded indices using both low- and high-end technology. Other debate centers on diametrically opposed concepts regarding the expense of electronic publishing. Specific points about physical design include a comparison of the options for individual or institutional maintenance of public file servers with the idea of combining centralized archives and centralized indices with pointers to distributed local archives.

The ideas in this book are conveyed accurately yet eloquently and convey the realities of human nature, sometimes in a comic manner. Typos occasionally dot the pages but are overshadowed by an inventive cyber lexicon (such as "e-conversations") and by the consistent passion of the discussion.

The editors are sensitive to the ideals and interests of users of the technology and seem to offer the most versatile array of ideas and concepts from those qualified enough to warrant our attention. Occasionally, the reader may feel a bit humbled if he or she is not directly involved in the design scheme of an electronic publishing venture. However, the editors appear to appreciate the fact that many readers may be new to the electronic publishing environment, because much information is reiterated and explained parenthetically throughout the book.

Development of the general thesis of the text is intelligent, thought-provoking, and intuitive. Explicit and necessary explanatory notes on presentation are aptly provided. The text is thoughtfully edited not only for grammar but continuity. A little confusion may arise, however, as numerous discussants enter the dialogue (3 Pauls appear in the first 4 sections). In addition, cumbersome structures are used to handle responses to a response to a response. Another drawback is the lack of discussion regarding privacy and security systems.

Anyone involved in scientific writing or publishing could find the information interesting, and even systems operators may appreciate the communications hardware

and software aspects of certain discussions. Moreover, scientific and technical individuals directly involved in systems design and development may find this book an excellent source of ideas and applications.

Gary Michael Smith

Gary Michael Smith is managing editor of Hypertension, in New Orleans, Louisiana, where he also writes creative nonfiction essays for publication in literary journals and production as monologues on the stage.