EDITORIAL

IMPACTS OF ELECTRONIC PUBLICATION

It has been a while since I wrote about publication. Since then, times have changed, and the publication environment has changed. When I first got involved with publishing beyond authorship, I reviewed papers for various journals. Back then, the manuscript came in a big envelope on real paper. I would procrastinate, then finally read the manuscript carefully and write my thoughts down tediously on the manuscript by hand. I had to make sure that they were legible. When I had to make lengthy comments, I typed them up. Initially, I used a manual typewriter, then an electrical one, followed by an electronic one, then I used a computer terminal, and finally I typed my comments on a personal computer hooked up to the Internet. It took many days to get the package from the editor by mail and a similar number of days to send it back.

As an author, I waited patiently for the journal to acknowledge receipt of my manuscript, then I waited for the lengthy review, the decision, and the typesetting. I was given a limited amount of time to proofread, and I waited again for its printed publication in the journal and 100 reprints. After fulfilling the reprint requests, I usually kept the undistributed copies for a few years and then ultimately thinned them down due to limited storage, often regretting the thinning a few years afterwards. The submission and publication process took many months. It was not surprising to have it last more than a year.

The computer and Internet age changed all of this. The communication lags between the editor, the reviewers, and the author are gone, along with the paper manuscripts that pile up on the desk. A typical publication cycle takes 150 days now instead of 250 days, if you consider appearance on the digital library equivalent to the arrival of a printed journal on your desk. The papers not only appear instantly, but they also can be recalled or updated instantly. The former capability can be used to remove duplicate or unethical publications, and the latter can be used to incorporate errata. The digital library also facilitates low-cost color publication, and even audio and video multimedia.

So, how do we take better advantage of these progresses?

As an editor, I would like to see high-quality proceedings articles properly reviewed, improved, and archived in a journal. As an author, I would like my proceedings article perfected, widely published, and archived for future reference. However, there is always the issue of double publication. The digital library can change that. Unless the author is an individual with publication cycle. Unless the author is an individual with

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low economic means, such as a student without the backing of a funded project, it is an act of responsibility to pay the page charge to make the society’s publication business sustainable. My understanding is that most society journals, including JM³, are service publications that do not make a profit. They need the income from publication charges to sustain the operation, particularly in these tough economic times.

Happy submitting! Happy reading!

Burn J. Lin
Editor-in-Chief