

# Electronic Journal Delivery in Academic Libraries

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**SUMMARY.** The authors recount experiences of the variety of problems and issues involved in providing access to electronic journals in a large academic library. The paper excludes concerns emanating from decisions to subscribe to aggregations such as those produced by vendors like EBSCO, but concentrates on scholarly journals ordered individually, or as part of a scholarly or scientific society package. Despite the number of years that publishers have been offering electronic journals, pricing policies are still fluid, and the problems of access encountered in the late 1990s still cause frustrating delays in provision of access to our academic staff and students. Questions on whether or not

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to use a subscription agent to assist in solving these problems are raised. There are no hard and fast rules, and no easy answers. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2007 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

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### ***INTRODUCTION***

There are many decisions confronting libraries when they provide access to electronic journals. These are not limited to selection of content, but include technology, license, training and publicity issues. This paper considers scholarly journal titles ordered individually, omitting aggregations and the “Big Deal.” Even with this narrow focus there is abundant scope for variety, as publishers reassess their subscription options on what sometimes feels like a daily basis. The paper will not be discussing training, publicity or license issues, as these are beyond the scope of activities undertaken by the ejournal administrators. The authors analyzed pricing convolutions entertained by publishers of scholarly journals, and the vagaries of access provisions in previous articles in 2001 and 2002. These are available at <<http://www.alia.org.au/alj/50.4/full.text/electronic.journals.html>> and <<http://www.alia.org.au/alj/51.3/full.text/electronic.journals.html>>.

### ***ROLE OF EJOURNAL ADMINISTRATORS***

The role of ejournal administrators varies from institution to institution. Founded in 1853, the University of Melbourne is one of Australia’s leading research universities, with over 30,000 students in a broad range of disciplines. When the work first became necessary at the University in the mid ’90s, one person, who also undertook a variety of other tasks, fulfilled this role. The work grew, however, in volume and complexity, with the growth in the electronic journal industry. Now, responsibility for electronic resources are shared between different personnel. Other staff (including collection managers) are responsible for establishing links from abstracting and indexing services to the full-text journals, systems maintenance, and license negotiation. The adminis-

trators share with other colleagues the e-resource acquisition and cataloging processes. The administrators' exclusive tasks include setting up electronic journal access, ensuring required passwords are available and monitoring sites for content changes. Arguably the most important and time consuming, however, is their role as a point of contact for users experiencing access difficulties.

The workload of the ejournal administrators shows no signs of diminishing in the foreseeable future. The authors had expected that the workload would diminish rather than expand as electronic provision of information became increasingly common over the past few years, but this has not eventuated. The provision of electronic access has become mainstream, as expected, but the means of ensuring access are still time consuming. It has proved impossible to create standard flowcharts to streamline the tasks involved in providing access. Each publisher or vendor has its own methods, and these remain fluid. Publishers are improving their processes and so are subscription agents, but there is a long way to go yet before electronic journals are integrated into workflows in the manner of print journals. As Rollo Turner notes, "The management of electronic titles calls for greater skills than was the case with print and so electronic journals are taking a much greater amount of professional staff time" (Turner).

In spite of considerable efforts by libraries, agents and intermediaries to develop systems and ways of working to minimize costs it seems apparent to me that the cost of administration [sic] electronic journals is in fact far higher than that for purely paper journals, and higher still when both media co-exist. What is worse it appears to be growing. (Turner)

Maintaining ejournal subscriptions and access . . . is not a function that is being done methodically here now—problems are dealt with as they are serendipitously discovered, but we don't have any method for systematically verifying that access is available (on an issue by issue level; of course we verify that we have access to new subscriptions, etc. (Harper)

### ***ACTIVATION OF ONLINE JOURNAL ACCESS***

Establishing access to electronic journals usually means registration at the publisher's site, providing the publisher with the institution's IP

addresses, and liaising with the institution's systems staff to ensure the technical aspects work smoothly. "This can be time consuming and at times not especially straightforward" (Turner).

I've been trying to identify the most time-consuming tasks for e-journal management and at the top of my list is (surprise, surprise!) the activation forms for institutional access to online journals. The major publishers have got reasonable systems for this but some make this process far too complicated. The worst problem is to do with the lack of recognition of Class B IP addresses. We have one IP address for the whole campus which looks something like this 176.111.\*.\* (this isn't our real one!) Very often we fill out all the details of our institution, administrator, administrator's username and password, name of administrator's cat, etc. and then finally try to enter the class B IP address only to find out it's not permitted in that format. Only class C or D addresses are accepted so all the information we've just typed in is lost. Then we spend ages trying to contact the publisher who then puts the class B IP address in for us manually (usually several days later). (Lewis)

Louise Cole from University of Leeds recounted her frustrations with the process in an e-mail to a UK based discussion list (Cole a). Cole's e-mail was answered by a number of other academic librarians agreeing with her views and relating their own experiences, such as Emma Hurcombe (Hurcombe).

Mieko Yamaguchi from Bangor mentioned that:

If you were at Rollo Turner's workshop at the UKSG last week you will know that the problem of having to activate access to "online with print" subscriptions using those elusive subscription numbers came near the top of our "suggestions for improvement." I am beginning to think that "free online with print" is actually very expensive in terms of staff time both for libraries and subscription agents. It looks as if publishers are beginning to unbundle print and online and this would at least give us a choice as well as more clout when online access does not work (wishful thinking)! . . . (Yamaguchi a)

The problem used to be frequently encountered at the University of Melbourne, and one of the authors also responded to the e-mail recommending the use of subscription agents to ease the burden.

Our suppliers for eg: Swets Blackwell and DA Information Inc. are particularly very helpful and have made our lives easier by entering our subscription nos. which is required for activating our online access on their website which helps to a large extent . . . (Prabhu)

Ingenta, a firm providing publishers with a web platform for their journals, acquired CatchWord, a similar firm, in February 2001. CatchWord subsequently was renamed Ingenta Select. Ingenta and Ingenta Select now share the same content. Any previous content, registration and subscription information accessed on CatchWord is now accessible on Ingenta Select. Ingenta is a document delivery service, offering access to its electronic publication collection and to a larger database of publications. Ingenta Select offers access to only the electronic collection. Ingenta Select also contains some books not available on Ingenta. (Compiled from <<http://www.ingenta.com>> and <<http://www.ingentaselect.com>>.) Confused? You are not alone. Library staff experience difficulty in knowing how to differentiate between Ingenta and Ingenta Select. Patrick Condron from the University of Melbourne raised the following points:

I have noticed while doing my electronic journals page updating today that CatchWord has been taken over by Ingenta and renamed Ingenta Select. Furthermore, we seem to be adding Ingenta Select (or CatchWord) sites that are an exact copy of other records we are adding for Ingenta sites. Reading on the Ingenta Select site, they are looking to integrate the two services to one, I assume Ingenta. Should we be removing any CatchWord records that have duplicate Ingenta records or has a decision already been made on this? (Condron b)

Louise Cole raised similar questions in an e-mail to the LIS E-journals list (Cole b). University of Melbourne has decided to provide access to the same title via Ingenta and Ingenta Select. This is part of a deliberate policy to provide users with all possible avenues of access through different platforms, given the notorious instability of electronic access.

Ingenta Select in 2003 changed its website for institutional administrators by adding a new symbol beside each subscribed title:

§ indicates access to this title is enabled for the years specified. If you have a current subscription and wish to extend access to this title please contact [support@ingentaselect.com](mailto:support@ingentaselect.com) including your CID number, journal title and subscription number. (<[http://www.ingentaselect.com/cgi-bin/sub\\_act.pl](http://www.ingentaselect.com/cgi-bin/sub_act.pl)>)

The result is that both Ingenta and Ingenta Select send out e-mails such as the following:

We have received your request to enable access to the Veterinary Anaesthesia and Analgesia. However, this could not be set due to the following reason : We have been unable to locate your institution within the files sent to us by the publisher. Please provide us with any payment/reference details that relate to your subscription so we can contact the publisher for verification. (<[subscriptions@Catchword.com](mailto:subscriptions@Catchword.com)>)

Claire Hill, Customer Support Administrator at Ingenta, revealed that, “The activation form is used to request access to a title, but we were finding that subscribers were requesting access multiple times causing duplications on accounts” (Hill a).

One of the authors suggested that, when titles are already registered, publishers could forward the new customer number to Ingenta and the ejournal administrators. Another suggestion the author made is for a web-based form to enable the institutional administrator to update information about previously registered titles, such as customer numbers. Claire Hill replied:

Depending upon the publisher and how access is enabled some publishers are able to change the customer number but a large number will provide you with a publisher account number that should not change. Your suggestion is a very good one and one that has been raised before but we will still have the problem of duplicate entries for titles. We are also starting to bulk load agent subscription files for Swets and Ebsco which will streamline the process. We are looking to improve the activation system this year and this will hopefully make things a lot easier. (Hill b)

Some publishers, subscription agents, and aggregators are starting to identify titles available for institutional access via online journal websites. Ingenta and Ingenta Select do not maintain a current listing,

as Stacy Pober, Information Alchemist at the Manhattan College Library, discovered:

Some journals offer free online access for print subscribers through the Ingenta service. Does anyone know how to get a listing on the Ingenta site of those titles for which we get 'institutional access'? I'm pretty sure there used to be a way to drill down into the site and display this, but either I've forgotten the meandering path of clicks or they've eliminated this option. (I'm going to e-mail them, and I know that they'll be able to e-mail me a report of our subscribed titles—but web access would be really nice.) (Pober)

Publishers, aggregators, subscription agents, and libraries are still attempting to understand each other's electronic roles and policies. It is encouraging to see some improvement in communication and understanding. Most University of Melbourne journal subscriptions are placed through subscription agents. Negotiating with major publishers for access to the electronic component of bundled titles is becoming less difficult. Most online registration forms and account details are now easier to understand and process than was the case approximately five years ago. Institutional administrators can activate the online component and keep the account details up to date on major publishers' web-based registration forms. Difficulties, however, still arise, especially when a subscription agent places a print subscription bundled with electronic access from a small publisher which maintains its own ejournal website. The division of responsibilities between the agent and the library can cause confusion. Often the small publisher has already entered subscription agent details on the registration form. This necessitates communication to the publisher by the institutional administrator requesting that details of the institutional administrator replace those of the agent, so that control of the online component of the journal subscription can remain in the hands of the institutional administrator. These problems and more are demonstrated in the following e-mail to Institutional Investor:

The University of Melbourne has a number of subscriptions to journals which you publish. These are ordered through our subscription agent, Swets Blackwell. The subscriptions to the journals include both print issues sent to us by mail and electronic access which you kindly provide from your web site. These titles include: Journal Of Derivatives, Journal Of Portfolio Management, Journal

Of Fixed Income, Journal Of Structured And Project Finance. The first issue is that we are confused about our account. Last year, an account was established under the username: one and one23 (not our real username and password). Originally the account was listed as Swets Blackwell Inc., Exton PA, USA. We thought we had changed the account details to Melbourne University with our Australian address. Is it possible that this account is not recognised as our account but as Swets Blackwell's? What appears to have caused our current confusion is our query through Swets Blackwell about electronic access to the Journal of Fixed Income. Your reply mentions account no. 12345678 (not our real account number). Are these two separate accounts as the journal lists are different? "My account" page for the 12345678 account lists the journals as Real Estate Finance, Journal Of Alternative Investments, Journal Of Derivatives, Journal Of Fixed Income, Journal Of Investing, Journal Of Portfolio Management, Journal Of Risk Finance, Journal Of Structured And Project Finance. While "My account" page for our one23 account lists our journals as Journal Of Derivatives, Journal Of Investing and the Journal Of Portfolio Management. The second issue is that as you can note, both "My account" lists titles that according to our records, we do not have any subscriptions for. Is it possible after resolving our account situation for these titles to be removed? (Crothers a)

Despite numerous e-mails from the authors and from the subscription agent, the problems with this publisher have been ongoing for the past six months or so. No sign of resolution appears on the horizon.

### **TROUBLESHOOTING**

As Duranceau remarks, "If a library offers e-resources, then without a doubt it needs staff to troubleshoot inevitable access problems" (Duranceau, 319). Problems associated with access denials can be caused by subscription breakdown, incorrectly setting up the access requirements, errors on the part of the publisher, or a host of other reasons. Finding what has gone wrong and correcting the fault can take a considerable length of time (Turner).

A loss of access to the journal *Genetics* was brought to our attention by an academic staff member. "We seem to have lost our online subscription to the journal *Genetics*. Is this correct or a temporary error?"



(Andrianopoulos). This was a case where we maintained a current subscription to the title, but the publisher wanted proof of payment from our subscription agent before restoring online access. Another query from an academic in one of our psychiatric centers asked, "Could you please advise the current status of the university's subscription to the British Journal of Psychiatry? BJP via Highwire informs that the sub expired January 30" (Troy). One of the authors e-mailed the publisher and access was rapidly restored, with apologies.

While one of the authors was activating institutional access to a Walter de Gruyter title, she discovered that all the links previously created for our other Walter de Gruyter English language titles were linking to the German language titles. All the links had to be updated so that they led once more to the English language titles. We had no notification of the changes in URLs from the publisher or subscription agent. Colleagues from other countries relate similar experiences. Lesley Crawshaw, from the University of Hertfordshire, noted that one recurring problem is when the syntax of the URL changes completely without prior warning from the relevant publisher. These problem URLs are mainly found by accident when checking the URL for a new title and she pleads, "We understand the need for change, we just like to find out about it in advance, not from our users or by accident" (Crawshaw 2002).

A problem Crawshaw related about accessing a title through Ingenta Select (Crawshaw 2003a) provoked a flood of responses on the LIS E-Journals discussion list providing further examples supporting Crawshaw's points. These include e-mails from Peter King (King), Graham Stone (Stone), and Carol Morse (Morse).

A staff member from Ingenta, monitoring the list, was quick to respond to the list explaining the problems which are causing the various difficulties raised by the librarians on the list, and outlining what Ingenta is doing to solve the problems (Meddings).

A flurry of e-mails related to problems gaining access to Aslib titles when they moved to the Emerald site. (See item 5 on the April 2003 archives at <<http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/lis-e-journals.html>>.) But sadly,

Still no access to the Aslib titles we subscribe to online, and Aslib tell us our passwords are the ones which should work, and asked us to 'try again.' This has now been going on for a while, and clearly we wouldn't report a problem if there wasn't one . . . E-mailing in the hope that someone will get this sorted for us, and again flagging up to lis-e-journals subscribers that this group of titles are a pain to administer! (Cole c)

Emerald responded on 1st May by assuring librarians that the obstacles they are encountering will be removed.

Those of us who have been raising problems with the ever-changing usernames and passwords required to access Aslib subscriptions through Emerald on this list recently will be pleased that a solution to all our frustrations is near at hand. It demonstrates the value of this list in trying to get shared problems resolved to our mutual satisfaction. I would also like to thank Aslib and Emerald for working to get this problem resolved. (Crawshaw 2003b)

### ***PUBLISHERS OR AGENTS FOR SUBSCRIPTIONS***

Has anyone looked recently into the economics/advantages and disadvantages of using a subscription agent for a journal collection of about 60 titles? For those who handle everything directly with each journal publisher: does it prove time-consuming? Has anyone changed recently and why? (Kewley)

“Even though it is more work for you, in some cases it is much better in terms of customer service to deal directly with the publisher” (Oster). Dianne Oster’s comment, although not in response to the above query by Kewley, is included here as a dissenting view to the majority opinion. Comments from a poll on use of subscription agents initiated by *Infoday* at <<http://www.infoday.com/default.shtml>> in March 2003 include the following:

- We used to use an agent but the financial outlay did not justify the work involved in trying to get them to act on our behalf. As we have a small number of titles, we now order all direct from the publishers and have had less angst and more money. For those who subscribe to a large number of titles using an agent makes sense and saves a lot of time; one just has to ensure one selects a reliable and active agent.
- We will continue to use a subscription agency because handling subscriptions individually would overwhelm library staff and the college’s accounts payable person.
- Have you tried to order/maintain dozens of journals individually?
- Are the people who voted no going to add on more staff to deal with all of the publishers?

As of March 10th, 2003, the responses were 71% in favor, and 29% against using subscription agents.

It remains a wonder why many of the publishers who give online access via their own site are unable to communicate internally efficiently (and with other service providers) and set up access to titles that they know we subscribe to. . . . Generally, tallying up lists and online subscriptions with publishers or service providers is an impossible task. We have a go every now and then, when staff time permits, but rarely (never!) get to the point when everything is correct. Before sending this e-mail, I thought I would just check the title Lesley mentions [in an e-mail to LIS-E-Journals dated 11 April 2003], *Journal of sports science*, as this is one we have just started subscribing to. We have set up an online link via Swetswise, our agent, and had not bothered with Metapress because of the problems with them, so I assumed everything was ok. However, I've just discovered that Swetswise have linked directly to metapress who have not set up our access!!! AAHHH! (Morris 2003b)

And from an Australian colleague,

We had a poor experience dealing directly with Taylor & Francis. Our problems were mainly related to issues of invoicing and failure on their part to keep track of payments and what they should be applied to. Similar problems occurred with this publisher in other parts of the University as well as the Library. I have stopped dealing directly with T & F and placed our orders for their titles through an agent. Having said that I think the problems may be because T & F do not have a business office in Australia, do not understand Australian tax requirements, and seem to stumble on exchange rates. In a country with a local office this may not be a problem at all. (Dartnall)

Taylor & Francis, like other publishers and vendors, maintains a presence on various e-mail discussion lists, and was quick to reply to the various complaints about lack of communication as well as the technical difficulties recounted on the list. They explained their efforts to communicate and ended by giving contact details for anyone wanting to get in touch (Thompson). Their staff certainly proved helpful to University of Melbourne staff working with the subscription agent to identify and re-establish access to problematic titles. The following e-mails for-

warded from the subscription agent explain how to go about activating access to titles available through MetaPress.

On 5th February they wrote:

Thank you for your e-mail—of course, here follows the process we advise customers to take in order to gain online access: The customer will need to visit <http://taylorandfrancis.metapress.com> where they can register for access. . . . When registering as an institution . . . the administrator will need choose an institution code (a short identifier max of 10 characters, chosen to represent the institution). For customers desiring IP recognition there is also the opportunity to input these addresses along with their main details. For those registering as an institution there are two ways to arrange access—they may e-mail [online@tandf.co.uk](mailto:online@tandf.co.uk) with a list of the journals to which they subscribe and subscriber numbers, I will then manually arrange and verify these. Or there is the option to ‘assert’ their own access to journals without contacting us the publisher—we will check for paid subscriptions in arrears. To do this customers will need to choose the ‘Activate Access’ option in the content menu and click on ‘Select Access,’ then browse for journals using the search facilities. By ticking the box next to a title and clicking ‘apply changes’ at the top or bottom of the page they can then view immediately.

And an e-mail from the following day gave further explanations:

Customers would not need to use their subscriber number literally on the website, as we will search for payment using the institution name and address provided upon registration. If we really cannot find proof of a valid subscription in this way, we will then contact the customer to ask for an agents reference or TandF reference to pinpoint the correct account. When asserting access, some customers may get confused with the second Activate Access option—which is to provide an Access Activation Code. They often assume their sub number or agents ref should work here, however this facility is not in use and as we cannot tailor it to our customers needs at present we are pushing Metapress to remove it from the website.

As the e-mails indicate, it is not all smooth sailing. As implied above, at the University of Melbourne, sometimes we deal directly with pub-

lishers, but sometimes we engage the services of one of our subscription agents as an intermediary. The working life of ejournal coordinators frequently can be eased by assistance from subscription agents we believe. As an example, to establish access to the online component of the *International Journal of Epidemiology*, we initially approached the publisher directly about our access problems, but brought in our local subscription agent, DA Information Services, when the publisher required payment details. The agent followed up on this and also thoughtfully supplied a list of other titles supplied through them by that publisher.

A less successful occasion when we used a subscription agent was when we placed a new order for the print and online access for *Human Molecular Genetics* but were unable to access the title. The agent replied to our request as follows:

I understand that access will be halted and all print issues will also be on hold for now, as there's some payment confusion with regards to our payment to OUP. We are definitely trying to speed up and clear up any misunderstanding/miscommunication between Swets Blackwell and OUP, and will update you as soon as possible. We regret that this is causing much inconvenience on your end, and realize that this is an important publication for your institution and will endeavour to solve this problem as soon as we can. (Gacek)

Turner cannot be considered a disinterested observer; nonetheless, the comments he makes are borne out by the experience of many ejournal administrators. "This situation is made doubly difficult for both library and agent when publishers refuse to deal with agents for the electronic content, even when their customers require them to do so" (Turner).

And as more libraries go online only, I think it becomes more important to have online subscriptions managed by agents whose years of experience benefit us all. For example, I need management reports that encompass all of our subscriptions. Separate reports from each publisher would be less effective and more labor intensive since we would have to compile them ourselves. And let's not forget one of the original needs solved by the subscription agents—aggregated renewals! It appears to me to be more efficient for subscription agents and publishers to resolve any problems

with the process of online subscription management so that we all can continue with successful business relationships based on our various niches of expertise. (Corbett)

Given the reality of the workflow in most institutions, most publishers seem to realize that they are shooting themselves in the foot if they won't allow clients to utilize jobbers. Even so, some of them have deduced that we have no choice but to pay the higher subscription price for that "luxury." (Blackwell)

Over the years we have had several publishers refuse to deal with a jobber. The reasons varied, but the end result was the same: order directly or do without the journal. I don't believe that this is a trend; I believe that it's the publisher's wish to eliminate, perhaps, the jobber's percentage in an already tight economy. (Eastland)

For further comments on this theme, see the archives of <liblicense-1@lists.yale.edu> for the month of June 2003, especially the e-mail from Richard Jasper (Jasper) and Peter Picerno (Picerno).

Chuck Hamaker from the University of North Carolina Charlotte asked for clarification on whether or not Elsevier allows electronic subscriptions to be handled through agents. Goldstein replied that she was informed by Elsevier that they do not allow libraries to go through vendors for electronic only access (Goldstein). Niles, however, responded:

That has been our understanding, but a colleague from our Health Sciences library told me recently that Elsevier will allow the electronic access charges to be handled by vendors, if the customer specifically requests (demands?) that it be that way. (Niles)

Davies Menefee responded on behalf of Elsevier with the following heartening news:

. . . Elsevier has taken the position to work directly with customers who purchase the electronic version of their journals. This policy has been consistent since the introduction of ScienceDirect in 1998. Over the course of time, however, some libraries asked Elsevier to allow invoicing and payment via agents for electronic products. Elsevier has agreed to this process provided there is mutual consent by all parties beforehand and a single subscription agent is involved. For print formats, Elsevier continues to work

with subscription agents and encourages libraries to maintain their agent relationships for print delivery. (Menefee a)

This is fortunate, as

librarians worldwide report a lack of responsiveness from Elsevier; failure to meet terms of agreements; inability to respond to title level access problems; lack of follow up on routine queries; sloppiness and intransigence if not neglect in responding in a timely fashion during contract negotiations. So pervasive are these experiences that the goodwill created by the online system, the platform and content, has been seriously diluted even though few librarians consider these behaviors as “personal.” They see it as the price of doing business with a monopoly service. (Hamaker a)

For some detailed accounts of difficulties librarians have experienced with Elsevier, and Elsevier’s responses to their challenge to respond, see posts by Phil Davis (P. Davis), Daviess Menefee (Menefee b), Chris Baumle (Baumle), Chuck Hamaker (Hamaker b), Bruce Abbott (Abbott), and Bernd-Christoph Kaemper (Kaemper c) on the Reed Elsevier discussion list during March 2003 <reedelscustomers@lists.cc.utexas.edu>.

### ***PRICING ISSUES***

A 2002 survey by Swets Blackwell on electronic journal policy states that more publishers than in previous years have changed, or plan to change, their pricing model (Morris 2002).

Perhaps one of the most uneven, confusing and frustrating phenomena facing publishers and subscribers is how to charge for electronic journals. Different publishers are exploring the marketplace to see what makes sense and how to protect their revenue streams from declining print sales. The frustrating area for libraries and consumers is that these varying pricing algorithms often do not make sense or are unnecessarily linked to the print product, whether one wants to receive it or not. (ASA 2002)

Pinfield commented back in 2001 that “the criteria on which pricing models should be based for all electronic products is still very unclear.

Should price be based on use? If so, how is use determined? Should it be based on size of user community? If so, how is size calculated?" (Pinfield). Publishers are still experimenting with pricing. For example, the *British Dental Journal* bundled print and online till 2001. In 2002, the publisher changed the policy to require a surcharge for the online component if required with a print subscription. In 2003, online access is once more bundled with a print subscription.

A query regarding restricted online access bundled with the print subscription to the Australian scholarly society journal, *Anaesthesia and Intensive Care*, obtained the following response:

The issue of single computer access to institutions is only temporary until such time as pricing and administration issues have been established. Our subscribers will then be further advised. Apologies for any inconvenience, but for the time being access to the AIC website will only be available via a single computer, the IP address of which is captured when the application is submitted. We will try to rectify this as quickly as possible and will keep you advised. (Conolly)

In 2003, Blackwell Publishing has the following purchasing options besides consortia deals for institutions. These are premium subscription with extended online access, standard subscription with standard online access, and online only subscription. For details, see the website at <<http://www.blackwellpublishing.com/cservices/pricelist.pdf>>. The Royal Society of Chemistry offers journal packages offering print only, print plus online and online only at <<http://www.rsc.org/is/journals/current/jpricing.htm>>. After consulting widely with its customer groups, OUP developed a two-stage approach to the new pricing model based on FTE. The 2004 institutional price list along with the pricing policy and conditions are available at <<http://www.oupjournals.org/prices>>.

I wonder if others who access this list have had the same impression as me, which is that pricing models seem to be getting more complicated. There are good reasons for this. I suspect that publishers (like OUP in this instance) are actually listening to librarians and what they say they want, but they are getting differing feedback. At one time publishers (in my experience) tended to be more interested in what competitors were doing and in the early days of online that tended to mean that every company came up with more or less the same solution. In practice from a library



viewpoint is the emergence of a range of models a good thing or a bad thing? Does it enable customers to choose what suits them or does it just complicate their lives? (Watkinson)

I've had e-mails from OUP about a banded pricing structure for online access, which will depend upon organisational size. I subscribe to several specialist clinical journals. There are only ever going to be perhaps 20-30 FTEs on my sites interested in the titles, due to the small nature of the clinical teams. To determine pricing according to the size of the whole organisation is as relevant—and as fair—as pricing according to readers' hair colour. The organisational FTE is not a relevant criteria to use. Organisations differ widely in the make-up. A large, single-focus research organisation will have far more readers for a specialist journal than a generalist organisation like us. The only way I can see that organisational FTE is relevant is a rather cynical assessment of the ability to pay higher charges. Does anyone else have any views on this. Has anyone else complained to the OUP? (Roddham)

FTE models of pricing frequently cause anguish, especially for large institutions. Institutional pricing models of scholarly society publishers are often driven by fear of membership losses and represent extraordinary increases to current library expenditures (French). For example, the pricing models of the American Geophysical Union (AGU) (based on numbers of doctorates awarded by each campus)

for electronic access alone result in costs more than twice current expenditures by UC libraries on print versions of the journals and there are no discounts on print subscriptions. Some major institutions with significant geology programs immediately announced they would not license AGU journals at these prices. The CDL communicated to the AGU disappointment with the pricing but continued to pursue other essential requirements (e.g., verifying that the content is complete, investigating mechanisms for linking at the article level to indexes). AGU has now agreed that UC could sign a single license for all campuses. (French)

Since that exchange, the AGU has responded further to complaints about an unrealistic pricing policy. Louise Cole from Leeds forwarded information to the LIS-E-Journals list in mid June 2003:

I thought you would be interested in the following message from AGU on institutional access to its e-journals, given the problems libraries have been having with the pricing policy. As you see, it was only announced last Wednesday, and as far as I can see, has not been circulated on library/HE lists.

Louise

Date: 11 Jun 2003

Subject: new AGU subscription options announced

Greatly expanding the number of institutions that have full electronic access was identified as a top priority by both the Council PRC and the PubsCom. A strategy for building subscriptions is the introduction of "per-user rates." Today, we began notifying libraries about this new option and about the opportunity for qualifying institutions to add titles for a very modest annual access fee. Institutions with active licenses of any kind were sent an e-mail message telling them about these options. You can find the information about the options at [http://www.agu.org/pubs/Institution\\_options\\_2003.html](http://www.agu.org/pubs/Institution_options_2003.html)

Judy C. Holoviak  
Deputy Executive Director and  
Director of Publications  
AGU (Cole e)

Because Cell Press relies heavily on individual subscriptions, its institutional prices for an online subscription have reflected expected loss of these subscriptions and are determined, apparently, on a case-by-case basis (French). Prices will be based on an undisclosed formula that is FTE based and depends on the number of academic staff and graduate students in biomedical sciences, including chemistry and biology, excluding health sciences (Hamaker a).

The UC libraries expressed willingness to consider a quote for systemwide access to the five Cell Press titles that is roughly two and one-half times greater than the collective expenditures on print, subject to the opportunity to verify that the personal subscriptions upon which the quote is based are those of UC individu-

als. Unfortunately, Elsevier will not, after repeated requests over several months, supply this information. It is impossible to validate the assumptions of potential individual subscription loss with no information on how the numbers are derived. In checking with other libraries we have found some prominent institutions resisting licensing Cell Press titles for similar reasons. (French)

Christine Orr passed on to the Chemistry discussion list the following information supplied by Thomas von Foerster of the American Institute of Physics.

This year, in response to requests from librarians for notification of our tiered prices, we have accelerated our procedures for setting and disseminating subscription prices for journals published by the American Institute of Physics. . . . We are grouping institutions into five tiers, based on fair, consistent, and objective criteria that measure research activity relevant to our journals, using current and historical data readily available to AIP. . . . For additional details on AIP's 2004 pricing . . . please visit <http://librarians.aip.org/tiers.html>. All subscription rates, including the multi-journal packages and combination offers, will be posted at that URL <[http://www.aip.org/journal\\_catalog/institutions.html](http://www.aip.org/journal_catalog/institutions.html)> by early June. (Orr)

### ***GRACE PERIOD***

As academic staff are becoming more amenable to electronic-only access to journals, ensuring smooth, reliable and transparent access is more important than when there was print backup. Swets Blackwell is one of the subscription agents working to persuade publishers to adopt 'grace periods' for electronic journals as they have allowed for print, so that access is not switched off on the 1st of January each year. Publishers have also been encouraged to process electronic journal renewals much more swiftly. The aim is to ensure that access continues uninterrupted, even if there are outstanding queries on pricing, payment, licensing, or other matters (Bley). The Association of Subscription Agents is also a key player and is calling for publishers to allow a grace period. The text of its call, including a code of good practice and a list of publishers granting a grace period at renewal time, may be found at <<http://www.subscription-agents.org/egrace.html>>.

The Divine/RoweCom debacle in 2003 has focused attention on the need for a grace period; for example,

The Society for General Microbiology will extend its normal grace period to the end of March 2003 for both print and on-line versions of their journals for Divine/RoweCom subscribers. The situation will then be reviewed. (Noble)

But even prior to this, many publishers were realizing that it is necessary to allow a grace period for electronic subscriptions, as they do for print subscriptions. For example, “This is to confirm that OECD’s standard policy is to grace electronic access for three months at the end of any subscription period” (Green) and “PNAS is pleased to announce the gracing of online access for institutional subscribers until March 6, 2003, as well as 2003 print issues 1, 2 and 3 for direct-ship customers” (Martin).

There are certain anomalies, however, as Crawshaw reports discovering:

. . . that the grace periods from some publishers didn’t always extend to the electronic version. . . . What we need are consistent grace periods otherwise this is another area of potential confusion for those of us trying to maintain access to our ejournals from year to year. Surely the grace period must apply to both the print and electronic versions of the journal, as in many cases we are paying extra for the privilege of online access. (Crawshaw 2003c)

She discusses a concrete example in an e-mail dated 11th April 2003 (Crawshaw 2003d) and Frank Norman provides an example from a scientific society publisher (Norman).

But a grace period would not necessarily solve the problem of loss of access—merely delay it.

I would be interested to know if we are alone in our experiences with ASCE online journals. For the third time after 2001 and 2002, we have lost online access to our package of ASCE journals. On-line Service has been interrupted since April 1, 2003. This time, we received an early warning on March 12 (ASCE Online subscription alert) that our subscriptions had not been renewed. On receipt of this alert, our library, in cooperation with our subscription

agency, writing in parallel, immediately provided the publisher with all details of our subscription and payment, including a copy of the processed check which was faxed in mid March. Payment had already been made in mid November 2002, and the cheque had been cashed in early December. We urged the publisher to ensure that online access to our subscriptions would continue uninterrupted. If there is a perennial mystery that baffles acquisition librarians it is that every year again payments made through agencies don't show up in publisher's records. No amount of grace period seems to help, it's only effect being that problems show up later in the year. This time at least we received an early warning, and we were optimistic enough to assume that our immediate reaction could avoid interruption of online service for our patrons on campus. Alas, ASCE did not bother to follow up our e-mail exchange, and in the second week of April, we were alerted by one of our patrons that online access had been cut off. We claimed again and asked to restore online access immediately. No response so far! We are now contemplating to ask for some refund of our subscription money if online access is withheld any further. Have other libraries had similar experiences? (Kaemper a)

Rani Sinha responded with a similar tale to tell (Sinha).

I can report that—with the kind intervention of AIP's Online journal services who are hosting ASCE's journals and requested ASCE to urgently settle the matter—we had access only one day after my message to liblicense-1. In compensation for the several weeks we were cut off from access, we will ask for a partial refund or at least a voucher to be applied to purchases of other ASCE publications. Our requests to the publisher for comments, explanations or advice how such a situation could be avoided in future went unanswered, as in the previous years. (Kaemper b)

### ***COMMUNICATION FROM PUBLISHERS***

Poor communication from publishers to librarians is a recurring issue on e-mail discussion lists, with examples that make one wince. The various e-mails concerning the pricing policies of the American Medical Association, for example, are indicative of confusion caused by poor

communication practices. See, for example, the e-mails from Mark Funk (Funk), Louise Cole (Cole d) and Lesley Crawshaw (Crawshaw 2003e).

In the case of the ACM Digital Library the information on their site for librarians is appalling or non-existent. I did receive a reply to a recent e-mail I sent to them about this, but unfortunately it didn't answer the questions posed. (Crawshaw 2002)

Has anyone experienced the frustration of patrons going to a journal website and getting the message. "Institution subscription expired in Jan. 2003"—when your institution NEVER had a print subscription or online access to the journal. Some patrons think we just forgot to pay a bill. Have there been any attempts to get publishers to use language that is less misleading—more uniform. It is a PR issue—but it can be a significant one. (Paldan)

This e-mail provoked an immediate heartfelt response.

Diane, you have hit one of my "hot" buttons! I have been extremely unhappy with the language publishers/providers are using such as you describe in your message. Our library has had several instances where we DID have a subscription and had properly registered for online access; there was simply a problem at the publisher's end coordinating the access. Some of our faculty become quite incensed when they receive a message that the "subscription expired." The assumption is always that we cancelled the subscription and the library is to blame. Or is that what publishers want our patrons to believe? At least one time the message appeared after a trial was over—we NEVER had a subscription that could expire. Yet again, the library was being challenged to renew. And I had to spend several hours researching the whole situation to discover that there was never a subscription in the first place. I really wish that publishers would find some more library-friendly language for these messages. There are enough instances when the problem is at the publisher's end that the declarative "your subscription has expired" is simply incorrect. How about: "You are currently not entitled to access this material. There are several reasons why this may be so. Please contact your library/site administrator for further assistance." (S. Davis)

George Porter points out that, while the IEEE has not done a very good job of publicizing it, it is providing almost all of the information needed to provide good access to the materials in IEL. He elaborates in an e-mail dated 15th May 2003 (Porter). IEEE responded to this e-mail from Porter thanking him, and then detailing all the library support services they offer (Spada).

With so many publishers adding additional backfiles sometimes free for existing subscribers, sometimes for a one-off charge, it is getting increasingly difficult to keep up with all the changes, especially when publishers don't tell us, their customers, about what they are up to. . . . Do you know that Annual Reviews, Inc. has now digitized all the backfiles of the Annual Review series, which can now be purchased for a one-off price of \$5000 per location? I've known that this was in process for quite a while now, and had e-mailed Annual Reviews, Inc. back in the middle of September 2002, asking for further details, e.g., would this cost extra, etc. As we have print/online subscriptions to 22/29 Annual Reviews, I might have expected that the publisher might e-mail me (as the online subscription administrator), that the digitization of their backfiles was complete and provide me with pricing/license details. I had been promised that they would let me know once the backfile program was available. Maybe they've sent it on a flier, but e-mail to the designated contact seems to be the most sensible route of communicating such information. It was only because I was looking for an article in the Annual Review of Astronomy and Astrophysics that I spotted additional volumes that weren't there previously. I don't know how long it has been since the digitization has been completed and pricing available. Those of you who don't already know about it—did anybody?—can find further information at <<http://www.annualreviews.org/inst-subscribers/ebvc.asp>>. (Crawshaw 2003f)

Alerting services for librarians can range from the extremely useful to the problematic or non-existent. The authors have found that the alerting services from hosting services such as HighWire are very useful. HighWire has operated a useful e-mail alerting service for some years. This informs librarians about the beginning and ending of free trial periods, and other relevant information such as activation dates. HighWire Press also sends around useful updates, for ex-

ample, news of new publishers joining their free back issues program. (See <<http://www.stanford.edu/dept/news/pr/01/highwire117.html>>.) But HighWire has realized the need for further information regarding loss of access through a new subscription monitoring service. In an effort to assist ejournal administrators in libraries to avoid loss of access to online journals because of expired subscriptions, HighWire Press has created a service for administrators of ejournals “that will alert you when access from a particular subscription ends, and in some cases this service will allow you to get advance notice weeks in advance of loss of access” (Goodman). HighWire acknowledges that this won’t solve all problems, but is a step in the right direction, particularly combined with the increasingly common publisher decision to allow a grace period for electronic access to journals around renewal time.

Ingenta has an alerting service called Ingenta announce <<http://www.ingenta.com/announce/index.html>> but this does not appear regularly and the authors normally discover new Ingenta titles through publishers’ and agents’ alerting services, such as Swets Blackwell’s Electronic Access Request Confirmation.

A useful publisher’s alerting service is the newly established BMJ Journals Library Resource Centre, with its newsletter.

Dear Subscription Administrator

Re: BMJ Journals Library Resource Centre on [www.bmjournals.com](http://www.bmjournals.com)

This month sees the launch of the BMJ Journals Library Resource Centre (LRC). The LRC is a webpage designed specifically for librarians and subscription administrators. We would like to invite you to view the page at [www.bmjournals.com/subscriptions/libraries.shtml](http://www.bmjournals.com/subscriptions/libraries.shtml). It contains information on pricing, site licenses, usage statistics, online journal features, FAQs and more. There is also a promotional resources section where you can download journal covers, logos, flyers and a poster (these can be downloaded for use on your intranet or in your own promotional pieces). The April 2003 newsletter can be found in the Newsletter/Updates section, it will be produced quarterly. To access the BMJ Journals Library Resource Centre please go to [www.bmjournals.com](http://www.bmjournals.com) and click on the Library Resource Centre link. I do hope you find the webpage and newsletter useful. We are keen to have your feedback/comments so that we can make this a valuable resource for you (please use the feedback link on the website). (Halfacre)



We currently have a NESLI license to access almost all of the journals on Wiley InterScience. The other day I was visiting the Wiley site as part of routine maintenance to check whether issues were yet available for 2003 for a number of Wiley journals which had changed their title at the end of 2002, and which hadn't been online the last time I checked at the end of March 2003, plus a number of outstanding queries which hadn't yet been sorted. We all have these don't we. . . . I was pleasantly surprised, but also slightly miffed, to come across a new offering from Wiley InterScience, called the Discovery Newsletter, which provide information on journal title changes, cessations, etc. etc. <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/newsletter/index.html>. What I was miffed about was why I hadn't been informed (as contact for the NESLI deal) about this newsletter, especially in view of the fact that I had recently been visited by a member of the Wiley marketing team, following on from my comments to this list about the splitting of some Wiley journals earlier in the year into separate parts. Several of my queries were sorted as a result of this meeting. But. . . couldn't Wiley have alerted me to this new offering, or was I expected to find out about by accident? The newsletter is very helpful, but does contain some inaccuracies. If the publisher can't get this information correct, what chance have we? (Crawshaw 2003g)

Blackwell Publishers also provides a service which is less than helpful:

Dear Administrator

We have now updated your institutional account and administrator homepage with the following content:

**Journal code: CCH, Cover year: 2003, Subscription type: Standard. . .**

FromSynergy@blackwell-synergy.com

Similarly, Springer LINK provides two alerting services but there is no information on whether they are new titles; therefore, the ejournal administrators need to check the Alert list titles against current registered titles. Administrators also need to regular monitor registered titles as these often disappear from the subscription list or access is disabled.

Please note that the University of Melbourne LINK No. 1234567 (not our real number) previously maintained electronic access to

the titles contained in the Word attachment. They are also no longer appearing on our subscription list. Could you please urgently reinstate these titles or report upon their electronic status?

We also don't have a current subscription to the following titles on our subscription list, could you please remove these?

Dysphagia Springer title no. 00455

Supportive Care in Cancer Springer title no. 00520 (Crothers b)

While we are on the topic of communication how do other sites find messages from Springer Verlag telling you that some (unspecified) new titles are now accessible in LINK? How are we supposed to know which titles? I've been meaning to contact Springer to remind them it would be helpful if they could tell us which titles are new but since I seem to delete these messages on receipt I don't have any example to quote (and they may not know which message I'm referring to!) (Yamaguchi b)

Lesley Crawshaw also comments from her experience:

Re: Springer LINK Alert—if that is what you are referring to I would agree that it is pretty useless, just tells you more titles are available, but as Meiko has already said not which ones!! I know us librarians have got a reputation for being pretty good detectives, but that is going to[o] far! I do have an excerpt from one to back up Meiko's comments as to its unhelpfulness:

“Subject: More Titles accessible now in LINK

Your application for access to titles in LINK has been processed; The print subscription has been confirmed and access set up. Check the entire list of accessible titles at <http://link.springer.de/cs/subli.htm>

Any titles missing?”

As a more helpful alternative I would recommend the Springer LINK Serials Update which tells you which titles are new, which have ceased, which are no longer published by Springer etc. You can register for this at: [http://link.springer.de/jour\\_update/index.htm](http://link.springer.de/jour_update/index.htm). (Crawshaw 2003h)

Ejournal administrators need to consider whether it is beneficial to alert users while sorting out these problems, as this message from one of the public service staff at the University of Melbourne requested. "Is it possible to hide these titles while the subscription problem is being sorted out, or put a message in the remarks field about the subscription problems?" (Condrón a).

### CONCLUSION

This article provides an overview of ejournal life in a large academic library. It is relevant for other information service providers, particularly those colleagues working on the customer service side. The paper concentrates on problematic issues affecting information reference colleagues and those in liaison roles. It aims to increase their understanding of the many and varied access obstacles so that this knowledge assists them when encountering customer access problem queries.

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