

The Changing World of Publishing



Now that I have been editor of *The International Journal of Oral and Maxillofacial Implants* for a number of years, I can positively state that the editor has no insight into the business of the publisher. Many readers have asked me about the business of publishing with the expectation that I know short- and long-range direction. They seem surprised that I am just as uninformed as they are. Of course, the benefit of not knowing any secrets is that I cannot divulge any plans that are locked in the Quintessence vault. This gives me the opportunity to comment on publishing without violating any confidential agreements.

As I see it, there are dramatic changes coming in publishing. Today there is a very large move away from printed material toward electronic media. Personally, I have not read a recreational book in paper format for a few years. All my pleasure reading is done on an ebook. This is actually a very liberating situation, as I can travel with one reader that might contain 100 books. I never run out of things to read and can avoid back strain from lugging around a bag filled with books. The reader device is lightweight and it is very easy to read.

When traveling, it is surprising to me how many people will strike up conversations about the ebooks. Total strangers ask if it really is easy to read (everyone seems to have questions about eye strain) and if there is adequate selection of recent publications (I think most books arrive in the bookstore the same time as they do in the ebook store). Many strangers tell me about their favorite books and I find myself ordering some of their recommendations while taxiing to the gate.

So it seems that there is a dramatic shift in recreational reading; however, there is a downside. I have to admit that I used to like going to the bookstore and browsing through the aisles. It was fun to stop into the ubiquitous coffee shop and drink a cup while picking out books for the upcoming weeks.

With pleasure reading changing so dramatically, I often wonder what will happen with technical or scientific reading. I already read large volumes of material on the computer for my position as editor. Doing this on the computer affords me the opportunity to comment on articles or make suggestions without the expectation that someone will be able to read my abhorrent handwriting. I can change the color of the text when I add or highlight passages from articles to make my point clearly to the authors. No more scribbling between lines or in the margins, I can now add as much or as little as necessary to communicate concerns.

You might think that the transition to reading all scientific material electronically might be an easy one. At this point, I have not made such a shift. The feel of a journal in my hands is still appealing and the ability to quickly access tables, figures and charts simply by turning a page remains more efficient in my hands than following hyperlinks. Ultimately, I do think that this is another transition waiting to happen, but it will likely take a few more years.

Current ebook readers are not yet facile at handling graphics, and download times are a little longer than one might wish when the files are large. Although a 1,000-page novel downloads in less than a minute, the addition of photographs adds time to the process and, until recently, all graphics were available only in black and white. Of course, this is improving with each new generation, so it might not be long before the turning of a page occurs with a click rather than a slide of the fingertip.

As I think back to my specialty program, I remember making handwritten notes on the articles we read each week. Before we discussed the articles in seminar, I arranged the notecards in alphabetical order and could glance at them to remind myself of the salient features of the article when called upon. Retrieval of notes outside of the seminar setting demanded memory of specific points from the article rather than a simple electronic search function.

It is difficult to say whether new technology is better or worse as it applies to long-term memory of details, but there is no doubt that when those details need to be retrieved, the electronic notes will provide a much better approach to do so. Ultimately, the ability to assemble a series of electronic notes and quotations made while reading an article will likely become the tipping point in the transition away from paper. Hopefully, this transition will carry with it a better understanding of complex ideas, as the ability to return to the original source material will be but microseconds away. The risk, however, is that many highlights will be stored in a hard drive and never viewed again.

Please rest assured that JOMI will be working to lead this transition rather than lagging behind the curve. You will start to see that our publication of case and technical reports will be limited to abstracts in the journal but will have electronic addresses to the full-text articles. Traditionally, this journal has struggled with the volume of case and technical reports because many of these articles depended on a large number of images to illustrate the technique. Historically, the journal had to limit article length and number of figures (including tables, illustrations, and photographs) because there is a limit on the number of pages that can be included in each issue. The page limit created a tradeoff between the number of scientific and technical articles that could be published. Editorial policy has emphasized scientific publications. Now, with electronic publication of these articles, we will be able to include a more comprehensive packet of images without diminishing other journal content. I hope that you will like this enhancement.

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