Walking the Talk

an Editor's Comments on Open Access

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Librarians are great advocates – championing literacy, freedom of information, archival access, etc. And it is not just about the talk, it is about living those values in our work and everyday life, promoting them with our patrons and users and in our community at large, educating our stakeholders and administrators, practicing them in our professional organizations, and essentially doing all we can to model the behavior that we advocate.

So, what about open access? This movement can be interpreted as an economic response to inflationary costs of serials and proprietary data; it can be a political statement about access to publically funded research; it can be an educational statement about furthering knowledge; and it can be a professional statement about freedom of information in its most fundamental and democratic sense.

Librarians are considered by other professions (and themselves) to be *the* advocates for open access; an effort has been under discussion almost with the advent of the World Wide Web, more than twenty years ago. With as many new open access journals, preprint sites and institutional repositories as there are, it seems like this endeavor should be more prevalent and mainstream than it is. Open access is still largely considered a new initiative, operationally speaking. While there may be an individual or a unit in some libraries that coordinates these efforts, the value of open access has not been internalized in many organizations or in the profession at large.

Internalizing these principles does require a commitment and with it, a risk, and some organizations have more to lose than others. For example, starting a new journal that is open access takes some start-up costs in terms of effort and time but it is starting with a clean slate; an established journal with a subscription or membership base has to consider what they will lose, in terms of subscriptions or members once people no longer have to pay for access and in terms of perceived prestige, by abrogating the traditional publishing model.

There is also an issue of archival access and sustainability. I have heard electronic resources librarians say that "perpetual access is a myth" and certainly the way that it is written into contracts is largely problematic. The profession has worked to seek solutions to this problem – Portico, Ithaka, LOCKSS and other efforts have made positive strides in this area.

Where it seems that we have not demonstrated this commitment is in operationalizing and marketing these efforts, the services, operations and the attendant policies related to open access reside within each organization, whether at the local, state or national level. While many of the professional organizations have been "having the conversation" about open access and

the importance that it plays with regard to scholarly communication, there has not been as much widespread effort by scholars, authors and publishers to make information available. Our position as advocates would be largely strengthened by the walking the talk in a visible way with our own professional values and scholarship but it will require some change of our fundamental values:

- **Aligning the evaluation and reward system for scholars to support open access as a value.** Only by working with researchers, faculty and content owners to show them how open access will fit into their value systems (i.e., promotion and tenure) will this effort gain traction. This includes looking at the merit and tenure systems to focus on the quality of the research and its impact, rather than on the traditional journal ranking with a high impact factor.
- **Act not just as experts, but as facilitators.** Gatekeeping has been one of the traditional roles for librarians, one that has evolved tremendously in the past few years to include not just finding and packaging information, but taking a more active hand in publishing it. In order to gain support from our faculty and other authors for open access, it will be necessary to approach them with open access as a solution that fits within their context, rather than making them conform entirely to library processes and policies. To borrow a phrase, if you build it without the customer in mind, then there will be no customers.
- **Acknowledging the economic realities.** Established journals, which rely on the service of their editors, review board and authors, may need to review how they operate. It may be that the reduction in costs of typesetting, printing and mailing a journal will offset any lost revenue in subscriptions or memberships.
- **Maintaining academic rigor and relevance.** It is necessary to translate the high quality of peer-review and exacting standards of editorial review into an open access environment. Divorcing the value of a work from the dollar amount that traditional publishing put on academic scholarship will be less of a problem than assuring the academy that academic rigor will be preserved

The editors of *Library Leadership & Management* and the leadership of LLAMA have embraced open access in a very real albeit somewhat risky effort. We do so in order to model those values that we advocate, to back up our words with action. In making the decision to go open access, we alone take the risk, by turning away from a traditional and practiced publishing model.

But, then again, the world isn't changed by playing it safe. Only later, in looking back can we see if others have chosen to follow.

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