TOPIC
OPEN ACCESS INFRASTRUCTURE

OA INFRASTRUCTURE: WHERE WE ARE AND WHERE WE NEED TO GO

THE ROLE OF STANDARDS IN THE MANAGEMENT OF OA RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS: A Research Library Perspective

A PUBLISHER’S PERSPECTIVE ON THE CHALLENGES OF OPEN ACCESS

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LETTER FROM THE GUEST CONTENT EDITOR

2013: THE YEAR OPEN ACCESS BROKE

It’s a pleasure to introduce this issue of *Information Standards Quarterly* on Open Access Infrastructure. When we were considering this issue, we were very aware that we didn’t want to revisit previous arguments about open access (OA), but rather take as our starting point the fact that 2013 seemed to have been a watershed for open access. Driven by a number of policy announcements from funding bodies and governments worldwide, the question is no longer whether open access will or should happen, but rather how will it be implemented in a sustainable way.

The articles that follow contain a wealth of insights from a wide variety of viewpoints—publishers, funders, universities, intermediaries, standards bodies, and open access experts. They were selected with the intention of providing the uninitiated (which is the majority) with an overview of where we are today, what the challenges are, available routes to overcoming those challenges, and some of the initiatives that have been put in place to overcome these challenges.

What comes across strongly from these articles is the complexity and interdependency of the issues that we face. When approaching the authors, I was struck by how wary many of them were about authoring an article, largely on the basis that they felt they lacked the necessary expertise or breadth of knowledge to do the topics justice. My personal opinion is that this is such a dynamic and novel area of work that such an attitude is a strength rather than a weakness.

While Sage’s David Ross is speaking about the publishers’ perspective, his comment, “that the uncertain and ever-shifting global framework presents publishers with unique challenges with respect to long-term strategic planning, shorter-term policy decisions, and the development of infrastructure and workflow solutions to support these,” could just as easily apply to all of the other participants in this area of activity.

What also comes across strongly is the importance that all the authors place on the development and adoption by everyone involved of standards-based approaches to overcoming the challenges for a sustainable open access infrastructure. Kaufman and Goodrich are right to note that “many publishers and institutions are still struggling to set up working systems and processes to support OA workflow for APCs and licensing,” though Moyle, Sharp, and Bracey summarize the current state rather more bluntly: “Stakeholders within the sphere of OA research publication do not benefit from the effective standardization of even the relatively few key pieces of information that support commonplace OA interactions.” There is clearly much to be done.

The final key theme that comes across is that of collective responsibility by all stakeholders to adopt/implement standards and engage in the various initiatives that are in place globally. Without such collective action, we are unlikely to move on from the hand-to-mouth, spreadsheet-based approach that characterizes far too many interactions between the various stakeholders.

Does this matter? Aren’t there myriad examples already of standards that have failed to lift off and doesn’t scholarly communication persevere regardless? Well maybe, but I would suggest there has rarely been such high-level institutional and political interest globally in the publication and dissemination of scholarly research. If we are unable to demonstrate our capability to meet the requirements of those who fund so much of this research, then we run the risk of marginalization.

I would like to thank all of the authors for taking the time to contribute some of their hard pressed time towards this issue, while they are all exceptionally busy dealing with the issues and challenges highlighted so eloquently in their articles.

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1 With inspirational thanks to David Markey, Director of 1991: The Year Punk Broke.