

If Secrecy is Human  
is Information-Sharing Divine?

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Several years ago I proposed that we advertise *Current Contents*® by offering an ISI® OATS® stamp, redeemable for one tear sheet, to any subscriber who would recommend CC® to a colleague. While aggressive advertisement of science information services was radical but necessary, such a “pure unadulterated bribe” was considered absolutely immoral. So we have not used such bribes to influence readers, and they have been recommending CC to their colleagues—with few exceptions.

Recently a reader informed me that a *Current Contents* subscription in his institution was a closely guarded secret. He had discovered CC by chance before his university department’s mail was distributed. He learned that only a few people in the subscriber’s department were allowed knowledge of the subscription. Lest any faculty rivals see

annotations on CC pages kept for future reference, the copies were carefully hidden. This was to me a new, and somewhat unique reason for ordering a personal subscription to CC. This story is another manifestation of the obvious—scientists are more or less human. Some people need the protection of secrecy. One is often afraid to divulge to his colleagues, friends, or enemies (competitors) valuable sources of information. Information is a highly valued commodity. If competitors need it, let them pay for it! At least this is what we often think. Those subscribers who do consider knowledge of CC’s existence a valuable secret worth hoarding might also consider the politician’s credo, applicable in most situations, “one good turn deserves another!” If that cliché doesn’t turn you on, how about the Biblical admonition to “cast your bread upon the waters.”