
A Voice for the Science Professional

Reprinted from *THE SCIENTIST* © 1(1):9-10, 20 October 1986.

If there is one area about which I can claim expertise, it is the scientific journal. Whether you call them serials, periodicals, journals, newspapers or monographic series, they all add up to information overload. But just as the world must learn to deal with overpopulation, it must also learn to manage the flood of information.

Recognition of that problem led me to found the Institute for Scientific Information 35 years ago. Helping scientists cope with their portion of the information overload crisis is what ISI is all about. It's the reason we started *Current Contents*, and the *Science Citation Index*, and all our other tools for helping scientists manage their information deluge.

The Scientist is the latest in this array of ISI's tools for professionals in science. In appearance and content it is, of course, remarkably different from our bibliographic products, such as *Current Contents*. But its aim is the same — to offer you practical help in managing your professional life.

Oddly enough, up to now scientists have had no equivalent to the trade papers of other professions. Physicians and attorneys have access to such papers, which keep

them up to date on developments that affect their professional lives. Don't scientists need the same kind of information, in the same kind of format? We think the answer to that question is Yes, and so we are publishing *The Scientist*.

That scientists need and want such information is obvious when you take a look at how journals of primary publication have expanded their purviews. In particular, the two premier interdisciplinary journals, *Science* and *Nature*, along with the U.K.'s *New Scientist*, are invaluable for their news coverage of science and science-related issues like arms control. But at bottom their first task is to bring their readers the latest in scientific developments. *Science* and *Nature* will always be, first and foremost, scientific journals; their central mission is to disseminate research results.

A trade newspaper for science faces quite a different task. Its function should largely be to keep watch over the things going on outside the lab that affect the conduct of science. *The Scientist's* subject matter will range, therefore, from political questions of science policy to financial topics affecting the economics of science, from the tough moral conundrums of scientific ethics to the frank

pragmatism of “how to” articles.

We expect to bring you information you simply cannot easily get elsewhere, in a format that gives you a quick, informative, productive read. Because you’ve gotten this far into our first issue, you already know that both our content and our form are something truly different in the world of science publishing; we really are a newspaper, not a journal in disguise.

The Scientist is clean, crisp, colorful and easy to read, our articles are brief but meaty, and our tone is direct and informal without sacrificing the seriousness we all demand in discussions about science.

You’ve seen our news and news features; now turn the page and move into one of my favorite departments: Opinion. Our opinion section will be run like the Op-Ed page of your daily newspaper — but its major contributors will be you, the working scientists. I’ve long felt that scientists needed a forum for making their opinions known, for exchanging views with their colleagues about the weighty issues affecting their professional lives. I finally decided that, since it was available nowhere else, I had to create this marketplace of ideas myself. *The Scientist’s* Opinion section will be one of the paper’s greatest strengths, helping foster our personal relationships with our readers, creating a truly interactive publication. An important part of this interaction will be our letters-to-the-editor column, Feedback, a regular feature of the Opinion section.

We’ll have many other regular features too, among them:

■ **Face to Face**, revealing interviews with the people who influence your lives because they make science

policy.

■ **Personal Communication**, first-person accounts by first-rate scientists of important moments in their working lives.

■ **Ex Libris**, pithy excerpts from important new books — the ones you mean to read, the ones with compelling things to say about the conduct of science.

■ **So They Say**, quotes from the world’s media that fill you in on what they think about science.

■ **Reviews**, of books, of course, but also reviews of software, of films and television.

■ **Tools**, covering topics about the nuts and bolts of doing science, from microcomputers to laboratory design, from sorting your references to organizing your reprint collection.

■ **Lists**, which will survey the minutiae of the scientific life — upcoming meetings, sources of funding, news about people, forthcoming books.

■ **Classified ads**, for scientists looking for new jobs, and scientists looking for new colleagues.

Responsible Science Journalism

While our ideas about *The Scientist* were developing, I gave a lot of thought to the meaning of responsible science journalism. In the U.S. and many other countries, freedom of the press is not a cliché, it is an ideal toward which we constantly strive. Scientists take for granted the now 300-year-old science journal, but they have yet to become accustomed to the idea of the scientific press.

Scientists do not normally apply the same standards to publication in newspapers and magazines that

would be required for peer-reviewed journals. But it is not just refereeing that ensures more objective "reporting" in scholarly journals. By training, scientists are steeped in the search for objectivity and truth. The scientific method does not provide perfection in knowledge, but it is an approach that, with constant renewal, gets us closer to it.

But scientists have more in common with journalists than they sometimes realize. Journalism, too, strives for objectivity and truth, even though criteria for newsworthiness and deadlines often seem inconsistent with truly objective and complete reporting. *The Scientist* will work always toward the ultimate goal of both science and journalism: accurate information about the way the world works.

The optimist-idealist in me can prognosticate about the future of *The Scientist*. But in this first issue I must confess that neither I nor my colleagues can really know the precise direction that this journalistic venture will take. We have specific notions about what is missing in the rest of the science media. We know that scientists, unlike most other professionals, have not yet rallied as a community to seek solutions to their common problems. One of our hopes is that *The Scientist* will help move science closer to that sense of community.

The "business of science" has become so dynamic that we cannot afford to leave it to the administrators of science alone. In addition we have been almost too successful in creating through science a technologically oriented society that is not adequately prepared for its consequences. The

ethical problems facing us as scientists and technocrats are fundamental. It will not be surprising to see in *The Scientist* discussions of this new interface between science and religion.

Aside from these profound issues, *The Scientist* needs to exist because there is no other unifying arena for the many traditional disciplines of science. This is not to deny the need for the continued existence of separate disciplines, but to point out how much they have changed. Why should there exist separate societies for physicists and chemists? Indeed, perhaps national professional societies are obsolete; science is uniquely international, both in its emotive and its cognitive content.

One of the most rewarding aspects of my first announcement that we were launching *The Scientist* were the letters, cables and phone calls from colleagues throughout the world. They made it clear that they had also sensed the need for a science newspaper. This was important to me, because I have always regarded ISI activities as a shared venture with our readers, transcending private ownership. I believe this enthusiasm was just a harbinger of the personal relationship we will have with *all* our readers.

Daring adventures involve trepidation, exhilaration, and all the human emotions known to those who spend their lives in discovery. *The Scientist* is, like the rest of science, a daring adventure and a commitment to discovery. Responsible science journalism, in this new phase of its evolution, is the natural companion to science itself. ■