

Ever Think of *Current Contents*
as a Newspaper?

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According to *Webster's*, a newspaper is "a paper that is printed and distributed daily, weekly, or at some other regular and usually short interval and that contains news, articles of opinion (as editorials), features, advertising, or other matter regarded as of current interest."¹

Under this definition *Current Contents*[®] [CC[®]] is essentially a newspaper already. And it is becoming more of one all the time. If we were suddenly to enlarge its present pocket size and use newsprint instead of the paper we now use, there would be relatively little--except for its subject matter and audience--to distinguish it from some 'typical' newspapers like the *New York Times* or the *San Francisco Chronicle*. In fact, during the recent paper crisis, we did switch to newsprint.

It isn't necessary to labor all the subtle distinctions that one can use to differentiate newspapers, magazines, and journals. Probably the most significant characteristics of newspapers, as most people see them, are their timing and format. The *New York Times Magazine* is, first off, a section of the larger paper, but it is printed in tabloid size, and then reprinted in journal format. The *National Observer* is a weekly magazine printed in newspaper format.

Most newspapers are at least tabloid size. The tabloid page size is about four or five times the page size of CC. Considering how the price of paper and printing keeps going up, it is not inconceivable that CC might wisely adopt the tabloid size. This would be more acceptable than some other alternatives, and perhaps even necessary if we continue expanding coverage.

Another version of my newspaper of science would simply be a merger of all CC editions into a single publication. Derek Price has suggested along these same lines that "...if one were to put all this mix [of important secondary services] together into a barrel, perhaps cutting out some of the more obviously overlapping entries, and divide it into a daily dose, it would go into a format the same size and shape as the *Wall Street Journal* with enough room left over for the newsier parts of the journals *Science*, *Nature*, *Lancet*..."² The problem of the resulting bulk would be solved by going from weekly to daily issue, as Price has pointed out. This is certainly not impossible in the case of CC. But at present it's simply impractical for reasons I've stated recently when discussing an all-inclusive vs. a personalized CC.³ The increased cost of mailing a daily newspaper, as well as the paper required, is not a trivial consideration.

About ten years ago I designed the *Daily Scientist*. This projected newspaper of science would have included something analogous to the stock listings of daily newspapers. This 'quotation index' would show what scientists were being cited that day. This would be a daily update of the *Science Citation Index*[®]. I still haven't given up the idea. I think it would be an effective complement to ISI's on-line SCISEARCH[®] system.

My speculations about a newspaper of science have also included the publication of original articles--the kind of thing one ordinarily considers only journal material.' A daily newspaper equal in size to the *New York Times* could publish the

total current output of the world's leading scientific journals.

In another context, Price has proposed such a *Journal of Really Important Papers*.⁴ This of course could only be done after citation or other analysis had identified them. This could also be combined with the expanded version of *Current Contents*.

There is more behind these speculations about a newspaper of science than an itch to be part of the newspaper game. There are some hard facts that, as a whole, the scientific publishing community seems loathe to face. Science pays an excessive price to support the 'dissemination of scientific information' because archaic methods of printing and distribution are used. Expensive paper is used to produce the average journal. Newsprint in combination with microfilm may be the modern solution. These methods of handling information certainly need rethinking. The volume of material handled by some of the larger scientific publishers suggests they would have little trouble learning to live with deadlines that are taken for granted by newspapermen all over the world.

But if the purpose of scientific publication includes the establishment of scientific priority, we ought to reexamine our methods for doing so. This aspect of scientific publication accounts for the publication of dozens of 'letters' journals. Most of the important ones are included in *CC*.

In recent years, both *Nature* and *Science* have assumed some of the functions of a newspaper of science. Undoubtedly, these two journals have the respect of the world's lay and scientific press. But somehow neither they nor *New Scientist*, except perhaps in the United Kingdom, have achieved a status as 'news

media' comparable to that of the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*-even in their own sphere. Indeed, what I once called the *Daily Scientist* could be renamed the *Chestnut Street Journal of Science*. This might require considerable advertising subsidy. Unfortunately, scientists are not regarded by most advertisers as a lucrative market. This may be contradicted by the success of the *Scientific American* and *American Scientist*.

However, until science does have its own *Wall Street Journal*, or a National Science Broadcasting Network, I doubt that its voice will be effectively heard in Congress or elsewhere.

In the near future, I should like to share with you my ideas on expanding *CC* to satisfy some of the as yet unmet needs of scientific communication. I have no desire merely to repeat what others do, or could do better.

For example, it has been suggested that *CC* summarize world news for scientists the way it is done in certain newspapers. We might also publish material on science-related topics not easily published in the many journals we index.

If you have any thoughts on this subject, I shall be happy to hear from you. I say that knowing that some other intrepid entrepreneur may seize upon the idea and bring out the first daily newspaper of and for science. If that happens, as I believe it may someday, then *ISI*[®] will only be spurred to become a great 'number two.' Perhaps the introduction in *Current Contents* of the *ISI Press Digest*, *Current Book Contents*[®], and *Weekly Subject Indexes* has merely been my way of inching towards a goal that has seemed unattainable to me if forced to start from scratch.

1. Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged . . . (Springfield, Mass.: G. & C. Merriam Co., 1968), p. 1524.
2. Price D J D. Society's needs in scientific and technical information. *Ciencia da Informacao* 3(2):97-103, 1974. --- This paper was presented as a lecture at Drexel University, Philadelphia, 2 February 1974, as part of a series of commemorative addresses.
3. Garfield E. *Current Contents*-all-inclusive or personalized? Using *ASCA* is a reasonable compromise. *Current Contents* No. 36, 8 September 1975, p. 8.
4. Price D J D. Networks of scientific papers. *Science* 149:510-15, 1965.