

CURRENT COMMENTS

New Year's Greetings —and Other Correspondence— Keep the Spirit Bright All Year Long!

Number 5, January 31, 1977

Letters from *Current Contents*® readers are a constant source of stimulation, frustration, joy, and sadness. Correspondence is so large that I can't possibly deal with all of it without assistance. In an average week I receive more than 100 letters. Some of them contain lengthy supporting documents. Others can be dealt with simply by referring the request to the appropriate ISI® department. But each is given individual care. Everyone at ISI knows how I feel about this.¹

Some of the most delightful, and least enervating, correspondence arrives on the New Year holiday. Our Asian colleagues send the most creative greeting cards--many beautiful enough to frame. Our East European friends often send cards relating to themes from the history of science.

Perhaps the most original card I received this year was printed by the World Health Organization. It was sent by an old friend, a pioneer information scientist, Herb Ohlman. The theme of the WHO card, the inside pages of which are reproduced here, is the smallpox

eradication program in Ethiopia. The scenes in the card, originally in color, depict Ethiopia's campaign to educate people about smallpox vaccination.

During the past year, I had a rash of letters complaining about subscription problems. During that time we converted our computer processing from a batch to an on-line system. This was somewhat agonizing, but the worst is over. It is significant that we can now process any new subscription order within 36 hours, and all correspondence is dealt with in a few days. If your experience is otherwise, you should not hesitate to write me.² If you prefer to complain by phone, contact one of our marketing representatives. In the U.S. you can also call 1-800-523-1850.

Each year over 30,000 different subscriptions must be processed. Like any other publication we lose subscribers for a variety of reasons. Obviously, it is impossible to prevent cancellation in some cases--subscribers unfortunately die. But hundreds of cancellations are due to other causes. Retirement is not an

uncommon reason. But many of our readers continue to use *CC*[®] after retirement so they can keep in touch with research.

The most significant cause of cancellation is financial. While *CC* is 'absolutely essential' even to some high school teachers of science, there are research scientists who rely on research grants to support their personal subscriptions. These have been lean years in some areas of research.

Because of tight budgets, some people have asked me to drop one feature or another in order to cut costs. Some people would gladly have us drop *Current Comments Press Digest*--anything but *their* favorite journals--if this would reduce the price. It is difficult for many individuals to accept the fact that it is the variety of customer satisfactions that makes *CC* acceptable to a large audience. What is of marginal interest to one person may be 'must' reading for the next. Greater selectivity for a smaller audience may increase the cost for that special group.

Often we hear from individuals in developing nations that the cost of a subscription represents a significant fraction of their budget. For the developing nations we have special rates for our more expensive services like *Science Citation Index*[®]. Perhaps we should extend this idea to *CC*. The best way to do that might be to include air service

at low cost since it is *CC*'s timeliness that makes it possible for scientists in these countries to feel closer to the world of international science! We already do this in Japan.

An increasing number of scientists write to me complaining that they need access to more than one edition of *CC*. It is not that they need access to more than 1000 journals. Rather, the mix of journals they require is peculiar to their multidisciplinary specialities. I often tell such persons to use our selective *ASCA*[®] weekly service. *ASCA* covers over 5000 journals. It has no subject boundaries. Considering the growth of journal coverage, the growth in the size of journals, and the inflation of the past ten years, *ASCA* is a real bargain. And for *CC* readers we have a special \$50.00 *ASCA* monthly supplement.

It is surprising how many readers believe journal selection for *CC* to be a somewhat mystical process. After twenty years of producing *CC* it is surprising that there are even journal editors who have never heard of *Current Contents*. Far from being an arcane ritual it is quite simple to have their journals evaluated for coverage.

Letters often complain about some of the material we include in *Press Digest*. Many of these irate readers think that I am the author, not only of the digests, but of the original articles. As a result of this we are

including in *Press Digest* a statement briefly explaining our editorial policy.

Professor Joshua Lederberg of Stanford University, who is also a member of the ISI Board of Directors, has this to say about the function of *Press Digest* and the editorial policy which guides us in the selection of items for review. "It is the function of *Press Digest* to give our readers a view of what is said about science, and in the name of science, both in the lay press and in scientific journals. Some of this material will stimulate thoughtful responses; some will be exasperating; we leave it to our readers to make their own judgments. In any event, it should be obvious that ISI takes no position on the material chosen for quotation here--not even on whether it warranted publication to begin with. Whatever their content, it is an historical fact that these selections have already appeared in print. That may be important for us all to know in understanding how science is viewed both within our own community, and by others."³

Many letters raise questions concerning the weekly subject indexes. The natural language of science is constantly changing. We think we do better than most in keeping up with these changes, but it is a never-ending task. If you have a better perspective on your own speciality than we do, then don't hesitate to contact us.

Frequency analysis is very useful in detecting new or better indexing terms, but there are slow moving fields where this may not be adequate. Our indexing systems are part human and part computer. They aren't completely automatic now and probably never will be. And certainly our treatment of correspondence will remain personal though aided by word-processors or any other devices we can employ or devise to make the process responsive.

While this may be a somewhat belated greeting to friends in the Western world, let me extend a Happy New Year to all on the occasion of the Chinese New Year.

REFERENCES

1. **Garfield E.** Learn to complain; the ultimate responsibility is with the individual, not the corporation. *Current Contents* No. 29, 18 July 1973, p. 5-6.
2. -----, Don't kill us with kindness--complain! *Current Contents* No. 6, 10 February 1975, p. 5-6.
3. **Lederberg J.** Personal communication to E. Garfield, 6 January 1977.

SEASON'S GREETINGS

祝賀新年

BONNE ANNÉE

عام سعيد

FELICES FIESTAS

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СЧАСТЛИВОГО НОВОГО ГОДА

The multilingual greeting above and the illustrations on the three following pages are reproduced from a greeting card sold by the World Health Organization for the benefit of the Voluntary Fund for Health Promotion. The illustration, which constitutes a single continuous 'panel' in the original, is the work of a traditional Ethiopian artist Ato Tesfaye Taye. In it he depicts activities of the smallpox eradication program in his country. The languages from the front of the card shown above are English, Chinese, French, Arabic, Spanish, Amharic (the language also of the captions in the illustration), and Russian.

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