

Current Comments

CC's New Publisher Address Directory

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I have always taken great pride in the cordial relations we maintain with hundreds of publishers throughout the world. I believe that *Current Contents*[®] (*CC*[®]) performs a needed service not only for the reader but for the publisher as well. Some people think it is a truism that *CC* serves the interests of publishers. The United States Postal Service, when it tried to prove that *CC* was not a periodical, asserted that *CC* was nothing more than a publisher's catalogue.¹ After all, the listing of the contents of a journal is a form of promotion or advertising for journals. Long before *CC* existed, it was common practice for publishers to list in their scholarly journals the contents pages of their other journals in the same field. You will often see advertisements for journals consisting of nothing but the contents pages.

Most publishers today would agree with the assertion that *CC* helps promote wide dissemination of their journals. But there is always a minority that is not entirely convinced. Some might even argue reasonably that in some cases *CC* has become a substitute for journals. The same thing was said about abstracting services 30 years ago. However, primary and secondary journals have grown together.

Over the years it has become clear that most readers use *CC* as a selective guide to their reading. They want to be

aware of what is published in a wide range of journals. They are avid readers. Most of them continue to receive a core group of journals which satisfy a significant percentage of their reading needs. Some of these journals are received through personal subscriptions; others by their department and shared with colleagues. Less frequently used journals are consulted in local libraries. Beyond this, a myriad of mechanisms, such as inter-library loans, *OATS*^{*}, and reprint requests, exist for obtaining a copy of an article.

The link between *CC* and journal subscriptions is so obvious that it is remarkable we never entered the subscription agency business. We were tempted to do so on many occasions, and have been openly urged on by many potential clients and publishers. However, we felt there were already many effective subscription agents in the world. I have preferred that ISI^{*} direct its energies to information problems that more clearly need solutions. I can see no special role for ISI, as yet, in handling subscriptions. Nevertheless, we do want to do everything feasible to promote the widest possible use and purchase of journals. This is why we have implemented our new weekly Publisher Address Directory.

It is obvious that having a publisher's address conveniently at hand simplifies the process and increases the likelihood

of entering a subscription. Without it, you are deterred a little from making a decision. So for many years we have included in *CC* a publisher's address directory three times per year in the same issue as our cumulated journal index. However, we realized that this was not the best solution.

Of course, whenever we announce a new journal we include the publisher's address with the first contents page we publish. We also do this whenever there is a title change. However, by not continuing to provide this information with every issue, we do not take into account the very behavior which we believe leads readers *ultimately* to order a journal. If a *CC* reader sees that two or three issues of a new journal contain relevant articles, a decision will then be made to order the journal directly or to encourage the local library to do so. At this point the name and address of the publisher are critical.

We have not been totally unaware of this problem, but inertia and production complexities prevented a quick solution. Effective in May, however, we implemented a new *weekly* Publisher Address Directory. It appears after the Author Address Directory. It lists the publisher's name and address under the title of each journal whose contents page appears in the issue. However, this feature has a few drawbacks.

Since certain publishers produce many journals, there is considerable redundancy in the listings. In some issues this could present a significant space problem. Even if this were not a problem, there is another problem with the format: the reader cannot tell who the publisher is without first consulting the directory. But to include the full name and address on every contents page is not yet cost-effective. As a consequence, in the near future we will include the name or trademark symbol of the publisher on the contents pages near

the journal logo. Readers can then turn to the Address Directory for the complete publisher's name and address. This format will be convenient for the reader and will save space.

Space is the primary reason we cannot include full publisher address information on the contents page. Another reason is simply that our method for production of logos is not computerized. Each journal logo is kept in a manual file. Over 6,000 of them must be changed. Just to include the publisher's name is a major undertaking and space will not always permit us to include addresses. Even if space was not a problem there are frequent changes in addresses. Journals which are published by a society one day are taken up by private publishers the next, or vice versa. And even publishers move occasionally.

To further help *CC* users and journal publishers, we are planning to reinstitute a practice we adopted in the early years of *CC*, but later dropped. We will implement a service similar to the one we provide for *Current Book Contents*[®]. It will permit readers to fill out an order coupon for journal subscriptions which we will send to publishers. However, we urge readers to contact publishers directly or, where appropriate, subscription agents or booksellers. Indeed, it may be these intermediaries who need this service most. Although publishers inform agents of their new journals, communication is never perfect. It always helps when you provide the agent with both the journal name and the publisher.

Neither *CC* nor any other form of promotion can make journals succeed if they contain nothing relevant or reliable. While some people may be influenced to subscribe to a new, but mediocre, journal for one or two years, eventually the truth will emerge. It will be difficult for publishers to recapture readers no matter how the journal might

improve later on. Therefore, it behooves journal publishers to put their best foot forward by insuring that the first few years of their journals contain first-rate articles. This is not to suggest that afterwards quality should be allowed to deteriorate. It is just my way to reiterate what should be obvious. Don't start a journal unless you have a backlog of good papers!

The competition for journal budgets is fierce. *CC* cannot solve this problem alone. However, by making research administrators aware that there is a lot of good material published, we can help them justify increased periodical budgets. The general perception of most scientists and administrators is that most journals are mediocre at best, except the ones in which *they* publish. We can change that perception only by restrict-

ing our coverage increasingly to the best journals available. But even good journals can run into financial problems in these inflationary times. A small percentage increase or decrease in subscriptions can make or break some journals.

Individual journals can and do survive without *CC*. And undoubtedly *CC* can survive without covering a particular journal. But collectively the journal publishing industry needs *CC*. By the same token *CC* could not exist without journals. We have a common interest in making the performance of research as efficient as possible. It is the decline in public support of research because of perceived inefficiency that publishers need to fear, not the efforts of those who try to systematize what would otherwise be chaos.

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REFERENCE

1. **Garfield E.** Is *Current Contents* a periodical? The landmark case of *ISI v. US Postal Service*. *Current Contents* (42):5-9, 16 October 1978.