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ASCAmatic—The Personalized Journal

The article by Brown, Pierce & Traub (1) on "The Future of Scientific Journals" has caused some comment by Cabe (2), Weiss (3), and others (4). The amusing aspect of this so-called controversy is that the service proposed already exists as Abelson editorialized (5) when referring to the *Automatic Subject Citation Alert (ASCA)* (6) as a means of "Coping with the Information Explosion." More specifically, the service which we call *ASCAmatic* also includes the automatic provision of tear sheets for each article listed in the computer report. *ASCAmatic* is the personalized journal service which Brown et al describe as some futuristic development. Furthermore, the *ASCAmatic* system provides a sensible transition from the old to the new and includes provision for copyright protection for publishers.

There can be no question, however, that, while *ASCA* service (sans tear sheets) is well within the budgetary limitations set by most scientists, *ASCAmatic* is not. Most scientists are not yet prepared to face the reality of what their present antiquated information systems cost in lost time, money, and energy. As the true costs of "free" reprints (7) are appreciated or compared to the cost of "free" Xerox copies, more scientists will avail themselves of *ASCAmatic* or comparable services.

Fourth generation computers might alter the economics of the personalized journal so as to permit substitution of complete computer printouts of articles to replace tear sheets or photocopies, but my computer colleagues will forgive me if I remain skeptical. The availability of large computing centers at certain industrial or academic institutions permits a select few to play expensive computer games on time shared equipment, but most scientific journal readers either cannot afford or will not spend what the personalized journal presently costs.

References:

1. W.S. Brown, et al, "The Future of Scientific Journals," *Science* 158, 1153-1159 (1967).
2. P.A. Cabe, "Computer-Based Journal Distribution for the Individual," *Science* 160, 209 (1968).
3. W. Weiss, "The Future of Scientific Journals," *Archives of Environmental Health* 16, 307-308 (1968).
4. J.W. Schneider, "Personalized Subscriptions," *Science* 159, 1305-1306 (1968).
5. P.H. Abelson, "Coping with the Information Explosion," *Science* 154, 75 (1966).
6. E. Garfield, I.H. Sher, "*ASCA (Automatic Subject Citation Alert) A New Personalized Current Awareness Service for Scientists*," *American Behavioral Scientist* 10, 29-32 (1967). See also: E. Garfield, I.H. Sher, "ISI's Experiences with *ASCA*—A Selective Dissemination System," *Journal of Chemical Documentation* 7, 147-153 (1967).
7. E. Garfield, "Is the 'Free Reprint System' Free and/or Obsolete?," *Current Contents* 8(22), 3-4 (1965).