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Maximizing the benefits of open access

Strategies for enhancing the discovery of open access content

Editors' note: From October 2015 through June 2016, two insightful colleagues will share their thoughts while they navigate the ever-changing landscape of scholarly communication. They are Maria Bonn, senior lecturer at the University of Illinois Graduate School of Information and Library Science, and Nancy Sims, copyright program librarian at the University of Minnesota Libraries. Each of them will contribute two columns within this period on different topics. Bonn's first column appears this month and discusses the discovery of open access content as we celebrate Open Access Week.

Since the early days of the Internet, scholars and researchers have recognized and been eager to exploit the potential of digital technology and networked communication to accelerate and extend the communication and discovery of research findings and of intellectual investigation. This deployment of online communication possibilities only accelerated with the widespread adoption of the World Wide Web. Easy and affordable (often free) access to the web helped create the reality of publications that could be distributed free of charge to the end user. The web brought with it the hope of, with economic barriers lowered, a greater economic and geographic reach for those publications than had been possible in a fee-driven print era, and the ensuing hope that greater reach would then result in greater readership and, ultimately, impact. These burgeoning aspirations and interventions and the adoption of web tech-

nologies for dissemination culminated, perhaps most famously, in the Budapest Open Access Initiative Declaration of 2002.

In the years since the declaration, open access (OA) has become widely adopted, as well as diversified and even commercialized. Whether it has yet to become a cornerstone of "uniting humanity in a common intellectual conversation"[1] is a matter for debate, a debate that rages throughout the overlapping worlds of research reporting and scholarly publishing.

If OA has not yet achieved this goal, I contend that while the quantity and range of OA publications has expanded greatly through the 21st century, much of that publication remains invisible to its potential readers. Research objects sit quietly, sometimes inertly, in the far-flung corners of the Internet. Sometimes they dwell in safe havens, such as institutional repositories (IRs), but there are few clear, well-marked paths to those havens. Sometimes they reside upon websites, which are beautifully and engagingly designed, but which, like some lovely but remote beach in a small country, few tourists know to visit.

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Commercial publishers are quick to point out that such obscurity is a result of removing scholarly publications from the financial marketplace. Traditional publishing models have assumed salable objects will result in revenues to cover costs and generate profits to expand business. This creates an incentive to market those objects in order to bring them to the attention of the purchasing public (both individuals and entities such as libraries). Once a library has invested in the purchase of a publication, it behooves that library to bring it to the attention of its patrons, who will then make use of the purchase and give the library evidence to help demonstrate thoughtful and productive expenditure of funds. So, the argument goes, in brief, if there's nothing to sell, why bother marketing? Where's the return? What's the point, for a publisher, in marketing free stuff? Does it matter, to a library, if users find free stuff? There may be no return, but there's also little investment.

A quick rejoinder might point out that not all publishing economies are cash economies driven by sales and subscriptions. There are different kinds of marketplaces. Publishers often compete for authors, whose glory redounds to that of the publisher. If authors are disappointed because the publisher does not sufficiently promote their work, they may vote with their feet and take their (potential) glory with them. Libraries need to justify the use of funds, but that is not only through purchases that are used. It is through canny investment in service that returns satisfied users, increases the reputation of their funders, and generally contributes to the public good of their local culture and beyond.

Open access models and discovery

As well as many different kinds of knowledge marketplaces, there are many kinds of OA. Each of those bears its own impediments to and incentives for attending to matters of discovery.

The most successfully commercialized OA model, generally known as the "author pays" model, in which authors (or their financial proxy) pay a publication fee to the publisher

to effectively replace revenues that might have been generated by sales, entails that publishers actively compete for authors and their publication dollars. In this model, it is authors, not readers, who are customers. If we presume that happy author-customers are those whose materials are circulated and read widely, we can also presume that the services that authors are paying for are promotion, marketing, inclusion in aggregated databases, and other things that facilitate discovery by potential readers. We see such incentives to OA publication called out, for instance, in the materials describing SpringerOpen, which has an entire page devoted to the indexing of its OA publications with the intent of "greatly increasing their visibility."[2]

Another model of OA is author "self-archiving" (submission of materials, sometimes personal copies of materials published elsewhere) to IRs and disciplinary repositories, where they enjoy the benefits of long-term preservation and access services offered by such repositories. In almost all cases these materials are open to users of the web. In perhaps the happiest instances of discovery, these repositories are open to indexing by search engines and will surface in the flow of online search. In less happy cases, because either the repository technology impedes search engines or items are insufficiently described, the materials lurk in the recesses of the web, waiting for someone who happens to know where to look. Discovery, if it happens, is often destination-driven.

The discovery scenario may go something like this: Well-informed or well-networked researchers say to themselves, "Hmm, Big University of Midwest State has an extraordinary reputation for research in my field. Think I'll go trawl around its repository and see if it has items of interest to my work."

My tone is arch, but I employ it for the sake of conveying skepticism about how often such active seeking takes place in a world of discovery that we commonly understand to be driven by search engines.

As column readers are certainly aware, there are developing services, such as SHARE

(SHared Access Research Ecosystem)[3] and CHORUS (Clearinghouse for the Open Research of the United States),[4] that may help alleviate the reliance upon proactive researchers and known destinations for the discovery of OA materials.

Those services have yet to be fully tested or widely adopted, so their impact upon discovery is still to be demonstrated. Those services will also surface another layer of discovery challenges. For instance, in the world of the Association of Research Libraries of late, attention and effort has been devoted to SHARE and its notification service (SHARE Notify).[5] But how will researchers discover it? It would be difficult to decry either its aspirations or use value, but that use value will be demonstrated by, well, actual use. SHARE does have task groups focused on this and related issues,[6] but it remains to be seen through what means and through whose efforts the interested stakeholders will learn of SHARE and incorporate it into their research toolkits.

We also see the flawed strategy of reliance upon destination-driven discovery in others kinds of OA publishing and distribution efforts. As a case in point, consider the burgeoning library publishing effort. I, myself, long managed such an initiative and was eager that it be associated with the brand of the parent institution. It quickly became clear that our publications needed to be not just dwelling attractively on our library website, awaiting the arrival of readers eagerly seeking them out, but also where readers were (the library catalog, Amazon, Google).

There is an increasing amount of high-quality scholarly content being published by academic libraries, but this content has yet to be mainstreamed into library collections and is only sporadically discovered. Its reach and impact thus remain limited.

Many libraries have a historically uneasy relationship to activities that might appear to be "marketing." Most are in the business of services, not sales. While they are happy to promote services, they are uncertain about approaches to marketing products and publications. Libraries are also not systematically

and strategically applying their long-held and well-developed skills in connecting users to information to the task of connecting readers to library publications.

If libraries were to apply such skills to OA discovery, there is a tremendous opportunity for them to yield considerable benefits and to perform significant service. To do so requires a cultural shift away from the mindset of "What are we to make of this stuff out there on the web?" to accepting OA publications as legitimate and valuable additions to our collections. Perhaps we need to adopt a mindset of "Good stuff! Free! Our users will like this!" Achieving this will not be without its challenges.

Many of those challenges came to the fore in a spirited exchange in June 2015 on the ACRL Scholcomm discussion list.[7] The exchange began with a query about practice in local loading of OA monographs and evolved into a discussion of criteria for selecting, acquiring, and managing OA publications in academic libraries, with consideration of the merits and perils of free beer and free kittens along the way. In the course of the discussion, Rick Anderson, associate dean for collections and scholarly communication at the University of Utah Library (quoted here by permission), summarized some of the challenges:

> We've had a deeply ambivalent relationship to free materials for decades now. Clearly some of it is worth "acquiring" (a word that no longer has an unambiguous meaning), and clearly some of it is crap. That's equally true of the OA subset: some of it is great, some of it is mediocre, some of it is garbage. Given that we're all still dealing with the problems of acquiring and stewarding high-demand toll-access information as well, this is a tougher problem than one might think.

Following Anderson's reasoning, we can see that if libraries can't find ways of addressing the problem, they can't acquire OA materials. If those materials aren't acquired, they don't make it into collections and secure

the attention to discovery that most libraries give to materials that they purchase. I would suggest that there are a number of actions that librarians, OA publishers, and content creators can take to increase the visibility and discoverability of OA publications and, in doing so, help realize their full value.

Actions

To achieve some economies of scale in library acquisition of OA publications, we should leverage the library crown and work the library network. There's no point in libraries all over the world laboriously replicating the same work of evaluation, selection, and acquisition when they have the tools, methods, and community to work in collaboration. Subject specialists might organize themselves in clusters to share the initial work of discovery and establish criteria for evaluation that can be collectively trusted. Pursuant to this could emerge a shared acquisitions and description process.

Meanwhile, libraries should ask of their suppliers (whether they be traditional publishers, libraries, or self-publishers) that OA publications bear clear and transparent documentation of editorial principles and process to assist in evaluating the publications for the library collection. Library publishers should set the bar high for OA publications by providing native metadata that will decrease the effort required to describe OA publications for inclusion in discovery tools. Finally, libraries should initiate conversations with commercial suppliers (of both cataloging services and library materials) to design feasible ways in which OA materials can be streamed into the acquisition workflow that has long supported libraries.

Ultimately, we need to refrain from seeing OA as removed from the marketplace and thus unable to benefit from market mechanisms. OA operates in a marketplace of ideas, reputation, and scholarly value, as well as one where cash moves around. To realize and make manifest the full value of OA, it's time to stop complaining about the weather and do something about it. With a little professional climate change, our users, both the local ones and those around the world, will be able to see OA publications in the clear light of day from miles away.

Notes

1. Budapest Open Access Initiative Declaration, www.budapestopenaccessinitiative.org/read.

2. Are SpringerOpen journals indexed in bibliographic databases and search engines? www.springeropen.com/about/faq/indexing.

3. SHARE, www.share-research.org/.

4. CHORUS, www.chorusaccess.org/.

5. SHARE Notify, www.share-research.org/projects/share-notify/.

6. Recap of SHARE Community Meeting, Summer 2015, www.share-research.org/2015/07/share-update-july-2015/.

7. ACRL Scholcomm discussion list, www.ala.org/acrl/issues/scholcomm/scholcommdiscussion. ℤ

177–88, and Debra Gilchrist, "A Twenty Year Path: Learning About Assessment; Learning From Assessment," *Communications in Information Literacy* 3, no. 2 (2009): 70–79.

2. The seven questions were first presented at the Michigan Library Association Academic Libraries 2014 Conference, May 2014.

3. Banner is an enterprise resource planning system used in higher education to manage student information, such as course registration, grades, major, transcripts, and advising.

4. "Assessment in Action: Academic Libraries and Student Success" is undertaken by ACRL in partnership with the Association for Institutional Research and the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities. The program, a cornerstone of ACRL's Value of Academic Libraries initiative, is made possible by the Institute of Museum and Library Services. For more information see http://www.ala.org/acrl/AiA.

5. Megan Oakleaf and Neal Kaske, "Guiding Questions for Assessing Information Literacy in Higher Education," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 9, no. 2 (2009): 273–86. ℤ