

Future Trends in Medical Publishing

Andrew Richardson

Within the publishing industry, the medical publishing market has for decades enjoyed consistent growth. So much so that it was said to be recession-proof. In the last few years however, the larger medical publishers have witnessed decreasing subscription revenues, partly due to the number of physicians levelling off, partly to customer choice. High profile rejections of publishers' "Big Deals" made headlines recently and the contentious is far from abating. In addition, all medical publishers, small and large, have had to adjust to new open models. So, what is the future for medical publishers? This article explores new opportunities in medical publishing from the perspective of a medium-sized, specialised publishers such as Lippincott Williams and Wilkins (LWW).

Consumers of medical information (researchers, authors, clinicians) are united in exposing issues in medical publishing today. The most common grievances are related to the slow process of peer review and submission, the fact that articles often reflect the opinions of the editorial teams both in respect of selection and substance and the fact that journal publishers are often perceived to be self serving, more concerned with authors than readers. Possibly, the most common grievance is information overload. Journals and articles published are ever increasing in number, but end users feel less knowledgeable.

On the other hand, traditional publishing still delivers perceived value: a sound model for origination, production and distribution of information, strength and trust in established brands, investment in publishing technology, investment in electronic delivery. What can publishers do to capitalise on these strengths? What fosters "better publishing"?

One important element is the type of information published: proprietary or from III parties (Societies). Because Societies are a publisher's customer and their members are consumers of medical journals, serving Societies ultimately means serving the best interest of the readership. Being one of the largest publishers of medical society journals, LWW is a good case to examine. Serving over 50 of the leading medical societies, including the American Heart

Association, the European Society of Cardiology and the American Society of Nephrology, Lippincott Williams and Wilkins (LWW) delivers benefits to its readership with its strong society publishing programme. For its Societies, LWW strives to achieve recognition- by promoting their journals within their readership; reach - by delivering journals in new formats and technology; recruitment and retention - by offering meaningful member benefits. Resulting revenues are invested to support the mission and initiatives of the Society, which again affects the readership. So, publishing partnership are an important factor in the add value chain of the publishing process.

Technology is another important factor. As traditional publishers look more closely at the web (some implementing new platforms, some relying on aggregators), Web-based products continue to evolve. If equipped, publishers can ride the wave and add value by promoting new forms of consumption (portals), new price models for differed user needs (pay per view), new tools to embed information in the workflow of their readership, their authors and casual users. Overall, publishers learnt that e-commerce is good and are embracing it, but only few have the infrastructure to implement a coordinated strategy.

Through its association with Ovid Technologies, LWW have become faster and more efficient in delivering electronic journals

to their readers, in offering workflow integration tools and in capturing and realising benefits for their Societies.

Some questions remain open: will technology solve the problem of redundant information? Can greater medical specialisation increase relevance for users?

How will Open Access impact on information overload?

As a medium sized medical publisher, LWW believe that important elements of the quest for relevancy are specialization, searchability by topic, not by publisher, title or brand, Electronic delivery of chunks of information, tailored to individual user and discipline requirements.

The tools to help medical publishers reinvent themselves and deliver new value to the information consumption cycle are there. It is up to us to take the challenge.

Andrew Richardson
 Managing Director, Europe
 Medical Research Division
 Wolters Kluwer Health
 Ovid Technologies, Ltd.
 250 Waterloo Road
 London SE1 8RD
 Phone: +44 (0)20 7981 0600
 Fax: +44 (0)20 7981 0601
 E-Mail: arichardson@ovid.com