



ePublishing 2.0

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Editorial

Peer reviewed, scholarly publications are a focal point of an academic career. A publishing system has evolved that supports this endeavor. This is not a static system but one that is adapting to new opportunities, such as the publication of ERA as an entirely on-line journal. Instead of printing on paper, ERA is distributed through the Internet. This is basically the only element of the traditional publication process that has been changed.

The adaptation of new technology often begins with an emulation of past procedures. This tendency is shown in this journal. The procedures, format, and general content of ERA reflect those of printed journals. The maturation of a new technology is shown when new attributes are discovered. Movies were first filmed with a stationary camera as though it was a member of the audience viewing a stage play. The concept of a moving camera brought new creative expression to the medium and clearly separated movies and stage plays.

Electronically published journals are at the same juncture. They can remain fixed in their emulation of printed journals, or they can adapt the technology of the Internet.

Much has been written about the morphing of the Web from a simple distribution system into a complex social network in which there is considerable interactivity. Web 2.0, as this trend is called, draws on collective efforts to produce results that could hardly be imagined a few years ago. Wikipedia, for example, has integrated the contributions of over a million people into a useful reference tool. ERA was created as an on-line journal in order to eliminate several important barriers. Eliminating the publication costs involved with printing and distribution of paper documents was certainly the most significant change. This is what Web 1.0 was all about. With that accomplished, it is now time to look at how Web 2.0 thinking can further improve the journal publishing process.

The editorial process begins with the screening of submitted manuscripts. Generally acceptable manuscripts then

need to be peer reviewed. Those that pass this filter are then edited so that they meet the standards of the journal. Much of this is done by only a few people, with the journal editor doing the majority of the work. The free distribution of ERA means that this critical activity has become an immense volunteer effort of a single individual.

Web 2.0 is all about social cooperation mediated through the Internet. Perhaps it is time to see if it is possible to tap into this potential and further improve the publication process.

An Apprentice Model

Wikipedia is created with an apprentice model. New participants are allowed to do small tasks that are then reviewed by people who have more experience. If the work of the new participants is of sufficient quality, these individuals are then given more access. This builds an open, trusted system that functions with the standards set by the originators.

Applying this model to ERA could take the form of requiring that people do some editorial tasks before they can submit their own manuscript for publication. For example, a person would peer review three manuscripts. The editorial board would then judge whether the reviews are of

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sufficient quality to move the reviewer into the next level of participation.

There are several ways that such a change will improve ERA. Most obvious is that a large pool of reviewers will be developed. This will significantly transfer some of the work load from a few people while only adding a small burden to many individuals. Equally important, the people who do the peer review will be gaining valuable experience in critically examining manuscripts in their discipline. This practice should help them improve their own manuscripts. This will lead, in turn, to a general increase in the quality of the research and the journal.

Asking potential contributors to ERA to invest a small amount of time in manuscript review is in the spirit of Web 2.0 publishing. A broader community that is invested in the discipline develops.

A critic might point out that having to do reviews before an individual can submit a manuscript will unnecessarily slow down the publication process. However, the Internet infrastructure permits the quick exchange of review materials. There should also be a number of people standing by who are anxious to do a review as they prepare their manuscripts for submission. This might actually speed up the publication process.

Individuals who successfully complete the manuscript review process will be entitled to submit their own manuscripts for peer-review. All manuscripts will come under the same peer scrutiny. Some people who do reviews may never publish in ERA. This is no different than the current system of peer review.

This change to ERA's editorial process is likely to be necessary. The current system requires that a few people devote considerable time to work that primarily benefits other people. Paper-based journals generally solve this problem by paying an editor and support staff. ERA was designed with an alternative model. It is time for ERA to abandon some of the last vestiges of the paper-based tradition and adopt the benefits of Web 2.0.

Guest Editor Model

There is an alternative model that shares some of the "community effort" that might be considered if the apprentice model is not popular or doesn't support the editorial process. This alternative is the Guest Editor model and it is based on the concept of publishing sets of papers that are all related to a general topic. A guest editor would take on the responsibility of handling the editorial tasks, including initially screening manuscripts, finding peer reviewers, and handling correspondence with the authors. The regular journal editorial staff would be presented with a virtually complete set of papers. All that would be required is a

standard check to ensure that the journal standards and style are maintained.

A guest editor should receive considerable benefit for the effort spent in handling the editorial duties. For example, the guest editor would gain recognition for leadership in the subject around which the papers are organized. This would also be a good opportunity for the guest editor to expand the number of professional contacts in the subject area. Journal readers would benefit from having a set of papers that is organized and conveniently arranged in a single issue of the journal.

Under this scheme, most of the papers that are published in the journal would appear in "special issue" groupings. Just like the apprentice model, this scheme will greatly assist the journal's volunteer staff by sharing many of the editorial responsibilities.

Maintaining Standards and Style

Every journal has a characteristic style and set of quality standards. Some of this comes from tradition, such as the page layout and general length of the articles. Other attributes are stated explicitly in the editorial policy (McClatchey 2006). It is essential that the standards and style are rigorously maintained whether ERA adopts the Apprentice or the Guest Editor Model. It is likely that the characteristics that guide the editorial decisions will need to be made even more explicit so that a larger group of people can effectively participate in the process.

I don't believe that we can maintain the status quo. The current editorial process unfairly demands too much time and effort from a few people. As a result, I ask you as a reader of ERA, to consider the following questions.

- Are you willing to review some manuscripts and help ERA step up to a Web 2.0 participation model?
- Do you have a topic that relates to the mission of ERA and are you willing to take on the editorial responsibilities to create a special issue?

Literature Cited

McClatchey, W. 2006. Improving Quality of International Ethnobotany Research and Publications. *Ethnobotany Research & Applications* 4:1-10.