

Is Electronic Publishing the Solution?



The cost of publishing a medical journal is substantially high particularly if one publishes monthly, or even quarterly. I am not aware of a health science journal that publishes monthly in the Philippines, and you can count with your fingers the number that publishes quarterly. Actually, cost is not the only issue here; the lack of articles is one major factor that limits journals from publishing on a regular basis. The Acta spends about half of its budget on printing expenses, and the other half on salaries of its personnel and office supplies. The question inevitably arises: will publishing online and limiting print issues cut costs and solve our budget problems?

When we envisioned the Acta as the National Health Science Journal and asked for DOST/PCHRD partial funding, the thought of tapping the faculty, alumni, residents, and even the general practitioners to support the Acta by subscription, and soliciting advertisements from the health care industry appeared to be an “achievable” goal. However, the timid response, despite attempts by administrators to shift to a “research policy” in the academe makes this goal difficult to accomplish. Our three year contract with the DOST/PCHRD seems too short to transform the Acta into a business that can sustain itself. Three years is also too short to transform a mindset of “research and file” into “research and publish.”

Should we then abandon our print issues, save thousands of pesos, and go online exclusively?

Some believe it is actually a no-brainer and we should join the bandwagon. But there are a lot of issues that still need to be threshed out. Publishing online has many hidden expenses, and several studies have shown that the “new” medium entails many costs, which may eventually cut expenses by only 20-30% as compared to doing print. Electronic publishing means paying certain indexing services and similar popular sites for linkages to give you “online presence;” the world wide web is vast and the existence of your electronic journal must be aggressively pursued. What is the point of putting your articles online if nobody knows that they exist? Another point against web-publishing is that standards do not really exist yet - and we are not only talking about form here.

Obvious advantages with online publishing include the fast turn-around time of articles making them more up-to-date and the accessibility of the articles to a potentially wide audience (if they can find you).

Web sites change and get lost in the web over time, but print exists in finite form, and can be accessed regularly and definitely, as long as you have a copy in your library. I have seen copies of the Acta in the archives of Northwestern University of Chicago and friends have seen copies in Harvard University in the United States. After fifty years, it would certainly surprise me if the original form of the Acta Medica Philippina website (www.actamedicaphilippina.com.ph) will still be around.



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