

MARKETING JOURNALS ON THE INTERNET

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The Internet is a powerful tool for marketing journals. OUP has been one of the pioneers in its use. This paper outlines their experience to date.

Introduction

It has been just over three years now since the journals division at OUP made its first tentative steps into internet marketing. It is easy to forget that in 1994 the world wide Web did not dominate the internet in the way which it does now. Our first experiments in internet marketing were entirely e-mail directed (if only because, at that time, neither we, nor most of our fellow publishers, had Web sites). It is also easy to forget just how tentative those first steps were and how apprehensively they were made.

Having discovered the growing band of academic communities who were being brought together by membership of subject-specific internet mailing lists (often known simply as 'listservs'), it was only gradually that we realised that the prevailing internet culture's sometimes extreme hostility to commerce did not, by and large, apply to appropriately worded postings from an academic journals publisher. So began a period of co-operation between OUP and a number of listservs whose members' interests coincided with the subject matter of some of our journals. Tables of Contents (TOC) postings to these listservs resulted in subscription sales in such diverse areas as early music, public opinion research, and holocaust studies. For the listserv members, our advance TOC postings were welcomed as an added advantage of listserv membership.

In the scientific area we were also pleased with the feedback we received. For one new journal launch, we received more requests for sample issues from the 10,000 strong InterPsych group of listservs than from the larger conventional direct mailing campaign.

Now, as we develop our own automated tables of contents e-mailing service, we can streamline the process of posting TOCs to specialist listservs by registering them as subscribers to our service: a considerable saving in labour which gives us the freedom to extend the offer of supplying TOC information to more listservs than previously possible. And of course with the introduction of our own service, we can extend our e-mail TOC promotion to cover *all* of our journals.

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Marketing journals on the World Wide Web

OUP opened its journals Web site in 1995, partly as a vehicle to launch its pioneering on-line version of Nucleic Acids Research, but also as a marketing vehicle to provide information about all the journals on our list. Two distinct marketing services have been developed, both of which provide the reader and author community with more useful information and facilities than any conventional marketing ever could.

Individual journal home pages

With separate Web sites for each journal, we can supply marketing information far in excess of what we could fit into a single brochure or advertisement. Instructions to authors and editorial board details can be provided in full, whilst additional information, like citation rates and a list of the key indexes which cover each journal, can be included.

At the same time, amendments to the information held can be made speedily and easily. With our specially designed Web-based forms, marketing department members can make changes to our pages which will automatically be implemented on the Web within five minutes, a refreshing contrast to the decisions that must be faced if a crucial change is made to a journal half way through the life cycle of its annual brochure.

The provision of information which is both more complete and more up to date increases the likelihood of converting interest in a journal into the desire to become a subscriber. So naturally we have included, on every journal's Web site, the ability to place an on-line order via a secure on-line credit card transaction.

Current awareness service

Directly following on from the idea of individual journal home pages, we have developed a constantly updated database, not only of the TOCs but also of the abstracts of every published journal article. Fully searchable, either within each journal or across all 180 of them, these abstracts have provided researchers with information which is more recent than they could obtain via existing abstracting and indexing databases. In the last few months we have reinforced this usefulness with an e-mail TOC service, which will e-mail you the latest table of contents of any journal the moment it is placed on our Web site.

No publisher is an island

When there were not many of us providing this sort of facility, it was possible to claim to its users that it provided a valuable addition to their existing information awareness and retrieval strategies.

Now a growing number of the major academic journal publishers are offering the same service, and the provision of this sort of information has become increasingly comprehensive. So we have accepted that we must support the development of 'one-stop' searching for Web-based journal information. Researchers will not be prepared to spend time entering a succession of publishers' Web sites to conduct individual searches.

Our marketing strategy therefore now embraces:-

1. Co-operation with the growing number of information aggregators who are seeking to provide single entry points and cross-database searching facilities to all publishers' current awareness databases, e.g. Blackwell's, Swets, Information Quest, EBSCO, OCLC, and the National Library of Medicine's PubMed system.
2. The establishment of links from key Web directories and search engines, both specialised and general.
3. The tailoring of the design, structure, and content of the individual Web pages on our site so that they have the maximum chance of being found, when relevant, by the major Web search engines.

How successful have we been?

Measured by orders and by on-line sample requests for new journals, we are very happy. But much of our marketing aims to maintain and increase our *institutional* subscriptions, where the link between marketing activity and subscription revenue is almost impossible to track. So the measurement simply of traffic to our site has to be an important yardstick. Journal sites with heavy traffic are likely to generate momentum for the maintenance of existing subscriptions and the creation of new ones.

In fact, the growth of traffic to the OUP journals Web site has been quite encouraging:-

- 1995 - 6 million hits
- 1996 - 24 million hits
- 1997 - 100 million hits

Individual journals are recording between 3,000 and 50,000 hits per month and these figures are rising fast.

In addition to testing our number-crunching software to destruction, as it extracts useful journal-by-journal analyses of usage, we are also experimenting with ways of key coding individual URLs. This is important, now that URLs feature so prominently in most of our marketing campaigns and now that a visit to a sample on-line issue is increasingly likely to replace the traditional sample copy request as a measure of the success of any particular marketing campaign.

Is Internet marketing cost-effective?

On the face of it yes, if, like OUP, your major in-house investment in the Web is for the production of full-text on-line versions of an increasing number of your journals. Your Web generated orders and prospect leads are set against imperceptibly small marginal hardware and software costs. In these terms, internet marketing is almost free, and at the same time has the potential to reduce significantly the cost of despatching sample copies of journals.

But, as very quickly becomes obvious to anyone who has been involved in even the smallest amount of internet marketing, the cost in terms of staff time is enormous. Web pages have to be kept constantly up to date (out of date information in this medium is not well tolerated by the market), links have to be researched and implemented, Web page structures and designs need to be continually reassessed and modified. I believe that, in a world where budgets are not unlimited, we shall be increasingly moving marketing resources from the traditional invoiceable goods (especially direct mail) into freelance overhead, paid overtime, etc. Indeed this has already started to happen at OUP.

Related internal issues which the growth of internet marketing have forced us to address are:-

1. 'Ownership' of Web pages. There is scope for considerable uncertainty here between editorial, production, and marketing departments, so clear guidelines and responsibilities have had to be set out.
2. Co-ordination of what is effectively a global marketing activity within a marketing structure which has traditionally been arranged regionally. We have addressed this by allocating global areas of internet speciality amongst the staff of our three regional marketing offices, backed up by a shared FTP database which records all our activities (so that we can break the allocation rules when necessary without treading on each other's toes).
3. How do we establish a system for prioritising our internet marketing activities?

We've established some ground rules, e.g.

- * concentrate on establishing links from learned society Websites over those created by enthusiastic individuals;
- * give priority to linking from sites suggested by editors and board, and to sites which have been updated in the last month or two;
- * prioritise the establishment of links from sites with large numbers of links *to* them (these can be verified via the facilities of either the Infoseek or Altavista search engines);
- * prioritise *Web links* to established journals where issues come out regularly and on time;
- * prioritise *listserv promotion* for new and growing journals.

Conclusion

As a growing proportion of the market for our journal material gets internet access, and as a growing proportion of our journals themselves put their full-text material on-line, internet marketing activities will become an increasingly important part of our overall marketing strategy. But we shall face many challenges thrown up by the frantic pace of change in this area. We shall face the blandishments of 'Push', of greater interactivity, of multimedia, and much more. More than ever, we shall be called upon to say, 'This is possible, but is it appropriate and is it more effective than what we are already doing?' If we can answer these questions carefully and thoughtfully, I am sure that we will successfully negotiate what will have been one of the most dramatic periods of expansion ever in marketing opportunities for learned journals.