

# Editorial



*Hazel Woodward and Helen Henderson*

“Digital objects formerly known as bits of journals” was the somewhat cumbersome but best description of articles that we could come up with at a meeting at ALA in San Francisco. This was one of the many discussions and events that brought home to me how far the paper and electronic versions of serials had diverged.

I started this editorial after several days at the Hay on Wye Literary Festival on the Welsh Borders and after many delicious hours browsing around the second hand bookshops. Looking at back volumes of journals I was led me to think about the recent discussions on the list-servs about the selling of back issues of periodicals by specialist back issue dealers, in many cases in competition with the publishers. Many of these back issues in the second hand bookshops are disposed of by libraries. The library has physically bought these and can dispose of them like the multitude of second hand books and serials I see here in Hay. If you are missing issues, or want to back fill the collection, you can just look around the second hand dealers. I remember in the 1970s, when the UK Public Libraries started to sell off their old or less used books, the publishers were extremely upset, as they believed this eroded their market. What will happen to this business with the increasing use of e-journals

and e-books? You have paid the same (or more) for them, but no longer do you have the right to sell on your old volumes. I remember in the 1970s when the UK Public Libraries started to sell off their old or less used books and the publishers were extremely upset as they believed this eroded their market.

However, the subscription model as a way of permanently acquiring assets is not dead, despite some forecasters. One manifestation is the way that Microsoft is proposing to sell its Office software applications on a monthly subscription. The comment in USA Today by Kevin Maney was: “Why would you pay money each month for something you already own? It seems as silly as calling a cab, when a perfectly good car sits in your garage.” This may again predicate a return to print, as forecast by some, as a result of the recent judgement in the Supreme Court Ruling on copyright (*New York Times v. Tasini*). The judgement, which confirms that compilation in an electronic database is different from other kinds of archival or library storage of material that once appeared in print, has also further separated the print and electronic by confirming that rights granted in one medium cannot be assumed in the other. Libraries have been wrangling over this topic since the introduction

of the electronic versions, and Inter-Library Loan of electronic items has also filled the lists, fuelled partly by Pat Schroder, the Association of American Publishers, accusing libraries of widely disseminating copyright material and thus eroding the publishers business models.

I felt that this was very well summed up by Jan Velterop (an experienced and eminent publisher and now a consultant) in a recent lib-license communication, in which he says that librarians in the main do not understand the power they have. "They can publicize and advocate the models like BioMed Central, where once an article is accepted for publishing after a peer review process, they charge the author a small fee and subsequently make the article freely available electronically (and for a small price also in print for those who want it) to anyone, anywhere, anytime. No restrictions anymore to interlibrary loanILL, copying, storing, sharing, you name it, among their users

(no need to call them Authorized Users anymore!), and explain what would happen if more scientists published their work in journals that adhere to these new models: maximum circulation, superb 'findability' if stored in the large depositories such as PubMed, and much lower costs to the 'system'."

So, librarians have a huge part to play and major opportunities to play them. They can work with the academic community, who in the main contribute and pay for the journals. They can also use the UK Serials Group where librarians, publishers and vendors work together to open out these discussions and come to conclusions that may satisfy the majority of the parties. This communications process can certainly be seen in the reports of the Annual Conference in this issue, and in the planning under way for the 25th anniversary conference in Warwick next year. More power to our elbows (as we say in the UK!).

*Helen Henderson*