

# Editorial

## Our guest editor for this issue is Gertraud Griepke

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### Content, Community, Connectivity

There are countries where information survived only if it was carved out of stone or transmitted via the spoken word, and in many cases they are, economically speaking, the poorest countries in the world.

In the past, we have seen different efforts to provide these countries with professional information. They did not last because of the intense logistic efforts, time and cost-intensive transport, and the problems of storing the information in the long term. There have been publishers who have started various initiatives in the past, and the library of the World Health Organisation (WHO) in Geneva, for example, provides a small library to hospitals with the most important medical books for practitioners. In fact, it is just a small blue metal box, which can easily be handled, locked and stored.

But this is just a drop in the ocean.

The need and the requests for scientific information in the countries of the developing world come from the scientists themselves, from organisations like the World Health Organisation and from the authors who want to be read in these countries, as well as from publishers and societies.

Information dissemination is a complex process. With the advance of the digital information age we are in a new phase which seems to make it easier to distribute digital content. Initiatives starting today find the ground much better prepared.

But the digital age faces new challenges – content, community, connectivity are the passwords of the digital information age. They have an important impact on new products and projects.

*Content* : many publishers now produce digital content, supply it without additional charge, and a customer can register directly for online access. However, open access to information content is not free of the risk of misuse and therefore it is important to co-operate with reliable partners.

*Community*: finding ways to grant access for a community together with a reliable partner, such as the WHO, is from an economic point of view a feasible approach which gives access to the developing countries. When content is provided on a large scale where the community defines the access rights, content has to be distributed and finally accessible.

*Connectivity* is the open issue in this context. Is the country connected and is online access available at reasonable cost? And unfortunately in many of the developing countries access is very expensive.

If there is a solution to enable publishers to reach their authors, readers, and customers without a mountain of administration, then digital dissemination seems to have the most promising potential. Clearly, scientists and researchers from the developing world, who may have spent time abroad and grown accustomed to the ready availability of scientific publications, both as readers and authors, will want to participate in the exchange of information when they return to their own countries as well.

In this issue of *Serials* we have three papers which address current projects where publishers are collaborating to help scientists in developing countries.

It is not just making the content available to the community, the concepts of connectivity, training

and education also have to be communicated intensely to all partners. The users and the librarians have to be trained and educated on how to explore and exploit this unexpected wealth of available content. And finally, this is not just one or two projects. The sustainability of the supply and use of the information must be taken into consideration.

Even climbing Mount Everest is done step by step.

*Gertraud, who is a member of our editorial board, came to serials from a background in science, having trained at first as a chemist, then gaining a further degree in Information Science. She joined Springer-Verlag in 1986, and has worked there in a variety of roles. Today, Gertraud plays a significant role within Springer’s global sales and marketing team. She is responsible for marketing and sales of print journals and electronic content, and co-ordinates international sales activities. She also manages pricing and licensing strategies, and has recently been developing the availability of Springer’s online content. When she is not working, Gertraud enjoys hiking (hence the cartoon!) and opera.*



Gertraud on an afternoon stroll up the foothills of Everest, bratwurst in hand... **Cartoon by Krebs**

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