

Mini-profile:

a day in the life of a product manager



KIRSTY MEDDINGS

Product Manager, CrossRef, with colleague Geoff Bilder in their alternative meeting room

At this time of year the first thing I do when I get to work is switch on the heater by my desk. CrossRef's UK office is in the rafters of a lovely 16th-century building on the High Street in Oxford. It's a great location and has lots of character, but it wasn't built with central heating and double-glazing!

The Oxford office is the smaller of our two locations, with only three staff. The other seven are in Lynnfield, Massachusetts, just north of Boston. A lot of people are surprised by how few staff there are at CrossRef, probably because of our large membership of 2,700 publishers and societies, all of whom participate in our DOI-based reference linking service (we resolve over 20 million reference links every month) and many of whom are extremely active on our committees and working groups. The membership is diverse, ranging from the big commercial publishers to the smallest not-for-profits, and our list of affiliate members includes technology and A&I vendors and a growing number of libraries. Working with so many different organizations is one of the things that makes my job so interesting.

With a cup of green tea in hand (we're an office of tea drinkers, and have quite a selection of green and black teas on the go alongside a lonely jar of coffee that patiently waits for visitors) and the office warming up nicely, I catch up with my two UK colleagues Ed Pentz and Geoffrey Bilder, who are just back from a meeting of the CrossRef Board of Directors in Philadelphia. The board comprises representatives from 16 different publishers, and as a group they determine our strategy and plans, with quarterly meetings to review progress and approve new projects. Among other things at this meeting they have given the go-ahead to start the pilot for the CrossMark project, which will see publishers applying a logo to their content that certifies its provenance and indicates whether it has been peer reviewed, corrections have been added, etc., etc. Although the early stages of careful research and planning are critical, it's good to be able to take a project beyond the discussions and proposals and start to see how it will work in practice, so we're pleased to have the backing of the board to move forward.



Kirsty catching up with other Oxford-based CrossRef staff members Geoff Bilder and Ed Pentz

I turn to my Inbox, where I look through the e-mails that have come in overnight. At the moment the majority are related to CrossRef, the plagiarism detection initiative that we launched last year. We have new publishers joining every week, and most will have one or two questions that need answering as they get set up to use the service, which allows them to screen manuscripts against a database of publications and highlights areas of text that match with other documents. One publisher wants to know what medical content is included in the database for checking against. Another would like an online demo for their editorial staff to assist with their internal rollout of the service. A third is asking for help trouble-shooting access to their publications for the CrossRef web crawler. I also take some time to review and add to the slides for a webinar we are running on the service next week, and post a message to the CrossRef blog reminding people to sign up for the session.

We have some visitors mid-morning. Two sets of visitors, in fact, which poses a minor logistical problem in our small open-plan office, which has a 'meeting space' in one corner but no actual meeting room. Ed gets to use the office meeting space as he has a group of librarians arriving to talk about opportunities for applying DOIs to library data sets. Geoff and I go across the street to a coffee shop to meet with a publisher colleague to start planning a seminar for later in the year. As we're leaving, the door buzzer goes again, but it's just another person who's misread 'CrossRef' for 'Dental Surgery' and wants the floor below. Maybe we should start a sideline in root canal...

Back in the office an hour later there's no need to look at the clock to know that it's getting close to

lunchtime, as the tempting smell of Thai food is beginning to float up from the restaurant on the ground floor behind the office (dreadful for making your stomach rumble if you're on a call and hungry at 12.45!). So I nip out and pick up a sandwich, trying very hard not to get drawn into any other shops along the way. The temptation is too much when I spot a shoe sale, but on this occasion I leave empty handed. Bank balance: 1; shoe collection: 0.

When I get back to my desk my US colleagues are starting to pop up online as their working day begins. We do a lot of instant messaging; being able to ask a quick question, instantly share information or documents, or even just say 'hi' really helps to maintain the small company feel despite being split across two continents. This afternoon we have a staff meeting (conducted in the more traditional manner by phone), and amongst the topics up for discussion is the planning of our members' meeting in November. This year will be our tenth annual meeting, and to mark the occasion we're planning an evening event in addition to the usual day of speakers and updates. The meeting will be in Boston, so there's some discussion of possible venues. We also confirm the dates for the main meeting and the accompanying technical meeting, both of which always generate a lot of feedback and give us an excellent indication of what's working well and what the members would like to see improved.

Time for an afternoon cup of tea (Earl Grey, my absolute favourite) and a quick browse of my RSS feeds to keep up with industry news and opinions. I make a mental note to do a bit of a Bloglines spring-clean when I get a chance, and delete those feeds I haven't read for ages. Then on to a call with a publisher and the product manager of their manuscript tracking system vendor to work out how best to integrate CrossRef with their particular editorial workflow.

Towards the end of the afternoon it's the brief period where the UK working day overlaps with the one in California, where our technology partner for the CrossRef project, iParadigms, is based. I have a catch-up call with the product manager there to see how things are going and to review the status of the latest publishers to have joined. We both come off the call with a list of things to follow up on; for her in the day that's just starting, and for me to pick up tomorrow, as it's time to head out into the cold for the bus home.