The Scholarly Kitchen

ADVERTISING, AUTHORS, BUSINESS MODELS, COMMERCE, CONTROVERSIAL TOPICS, COPYRIGHT, DATA PUBLISHING, DISCOVERY, ECONOMICS, ETHICS, EXPERIMENTATION, HOUSEKEEPING, INNOVATION, LIBRARIES, MARKETING, METRICS AND ANALYTICS, OPEN ACCESS, PEER REVIEW, SOCIAL ROLE, TECHNOLOGY, TOOLS, USABILITY


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Image via Chris M.

Editor’s Note: If you’re reading this blog, you likely know who Kent Anderson is. What you might not know is that Kent recently hung out his own shingle as an independent publishing consultant, starting Caldera Publishing Solutions. Kent now also has his own blog at the site, and it’s worth checking regularly. I recently realized that one of Kent’s most-read and most-cited posts, about the things publishers do, was in dire need of updating. Kent graciously agreed to dig back into this ever-expanding list.

The first version of this list was created back in the summer of 2012, at a time when publishers were being repeatedly challenged to prove they added value beyond managing peer review and some basic copy editing and formatting. The first post outlined 60 things publishers do. The post was revised again in 2013 to reflect 13 more things, bringing the total to 73. In 2014, it was updated once more, to add nine more things and update others, bringing the total number of things most publishers do to 82. Now, after more than a year since its last revision, here we are with a new post, adding yet more things to what publishers often do for authors, readers, and as part of their work.

It’s worth noting that we are adding an average of just more than 12 new items per year. While some of this is capturing things I failed to include in prior lists, some of these additions represent efforts and work that was once hardly noticeable but which has quickly grown. At this rate, we will be doing more than 200 things by 2025. How pushing more work into the publishing enterprise squares with reducing costs and increasing efficiency remains a conundrum.

The past few years have introduced a new level of infrastructure building – ORCID, CHORUS, and FundRef are just a few examples. Moving more of the publishing workflow and infrastructure online is also creating opportunities for entrepreneurs like Publons and Overleaf. Publishers are constantly monitoring, integrating, and advising these groups, a new level of activity with unclear payback for publishers, but clear added costs to the publishing endeavor.

Often, authors are the ones asserting that journal publishers do so little, which is understandable, as
authored only experience a small part of the journal publishing process, and care about the editing and formatting bits the most, making those the most memorable. In fact, publishers’ service mentalities often include deliberately limiting the number of things authors have to worry about, which further limits their view of what it actually takes to publish a work and remain viable to publish the next one.

To update this list, the Scholarly Kitchen Chefs were asked for ideas and advice (they came through in spades, by the way, so this is a special thanks to them), I brought a few of my own, and I went through the list to update items as I saw fit. Comments are open, however, and this is an ongoing build. Despite every new service promising to make life simpler, the opposite seems to be the trend.

All new items are marked with a [NEW] flag, and expanded or edited items are marked with [ENHANCED]. The concepts of “Difficulty” and “Duration” are used to express some of the qualitative aspects of building, running, or managing various aspects of a publishing enterprise.

1. **Audience/field detection and cultivation.** This is why you start a journal — there’s a new field emerging, a field splintering, or a field growing beyond the outputs currently available. Detecting and cultivating these forks and leaps in scientific progress is what a good publisher does. It’s not just about new audiences, but new audience needs within fields. In addition, publishers can create fields of study that weren’t apparent to the practitioners until disparate research outputs were pulled together into a salient journal property. Finally, with the emergence of general open access (OA) journals, publishers can start journals to capture the marginal increase in research outputs across many specialties at once. So, this activity covers many things, but for the sake of economy, we’ll count it as one thing. **Expense level: $$-$$. Difficulty: Moderate to difficult. Duration: Variable.**

2. **Journal launch and registration (ISSN, Science Citation Index, and PubMed, for example).**

   [ENHANCED] A small but detailed job, with follow-up being important. Both PubMed and MEDLINE are proving more labyrinthine and unpredictable than before, requiring more time and more iterations even for top publishers. Fortunately, ISSNs can be registered online now. Other systems requiring registration are emerging, adding to the list of items to tick and the details to manage in order to establish a new title. **Expense level: $. Difficulty: More difficult than ever. Duration: Longer than it used to take.**

3. **Create and establish a viable brand (including filing, protecting, and maintaining trademarks).**

   [ENHANCED] This is a step many take for granted, but it’s potentially expensive and time-consuming. First, what is your brand? How do you decide? Some use consultants, some use internal brainstorming, some use individual inspiration. Once you have an idea, you have to express it visually. If you want to protect it, you have to register trademarks in many markets, and renew them every so often. The initial registration is usually the most time-consuming part. Failure to do so may limit your ability to own your brand. Defending a trademark is part of the deal. The trend toward cascading journal portfolios and new OA-oriented brand extensions points to the ongoing importance of brand management. **Expense level: $$. Difficulty: Hard. Duration: Continuous.**

4. **Make money and remain a constant in the system of scholarly output.** [ENHANCED] Making enough money to remain viable and avoid cash pinches is a fundamental goal for any business. It seems even more important for a system based on subtle signaling of quality and prestige. This requires publishers to make enough money to remain in business while doing these other things, and that means making a profit, surplus, or gain sufficient to cover downturns, major technology transitions (capital expenditure budgets are ballooning for many organizations), field expansions, and parent organization (society or university) downturns. Believe it or not, but making money matters even for non-profit publishers – governance bodies become unpredictable if the money isn’t coming in, and investment funds are protected reflexively. **Expense level: $$$. Difficulty: Hard. Duration: Continuous.**
5. **Plan and create strategies for the future.** [ENHANCED] A famous joke is that the second book Gutenberg printed was entitled, “Now What? The End of Publishing is Nigh.” Publishers are famous worriers, and for good reason. Content has long been scarce, technological change is a constant, and risk is our shadow. Now more than ever perhaps, planning for the future is vital to survival. This level of planning has also gained new dimensions, including a global perspective that may be more urgent, technology strategies that are more central, and higher levels of uncertainty as new entrants create new constraints and opportunities. *Expense: $$. Difficulty: Moderate to difficult. Duration: Variable.*

6. **Establish, cultivate, and maintain a good reputation (this is vital to attracting papers and conveying prestige to authors).** [ENHANCED] A brand is a brand, but a reputation is even more important. You might say that *Nature* and *Science* are equivalent brands in some ways, but to many, they have slightly nuanced reputations. Organizations also have layers of reputation – editorial, commercial, management, and so forth. Reputations diverge significantly in some fields, and can take a hit before brands will. A strong editorial reputation combined with a weak commercial reputation requires a different strategic approach. Keeping your reputation requires a lot of good management throughout the organization. *Expense level: $$. Difficulty: Moderate. Duration: Continuous.*

7. **Funding of new initiatives, books, journals, and educational initiatives (3-5 years typically before break-even, and even longer before payback).** [ENHANCED] This is where risk becomes real — expenditures are made, financial projections activated, and staff hired. Without this stage, there is no new publishing initiative or journal. One of the main roles of publishers is to assume risk for authors. *Expense level: $$$$$$. Difficulty: Moderate to difficult. Duration: Sporadic.*

8. **Establish, integrate, upgrade, and monitor infrastructure systems and contracts.** [ENHANCED] Establishing these systems involves a lot of choices, and is often repeated as the years go by. The growing number of new infrastructure requirements and options has increased the obligations here, as well as the costs in both management time and financial outlays. Vendor selection is more vexing. *Expense level: $$. Difficulty: Increasingly difficult. Duration: Ongoing.*

9. **Solicitation of materials.** [ENHANCED] How do you get those first papers? This is often the responsibility of a thought leader or a set of them. As new journals have (over)used email, and trust in new journals has diminished for a variety of reasons, established publishers have to rely more on meetings and personal contacts. This increases expenses. Also, as portfolios become more robust, cascades more common, and authors more jaded, the option to stop soliciting materials is less viable. *Expense: $$$. Difficulty: Moderate to difficult. Duration: Ongoing.*

10. **Rejection of submissions (and in some cases multiple rejections).** Some of the first papers will be rejected, and if you’re successful, you’ll attract more papers than you can use, papers that aren’t appropriate, and papers of low quality. These have to be rejected, sometimes more than once. Communications with authors, a fair system to determine what makes it through, and ways to know what you’ve seen before are all important. *Expense: $$$. Difficulty: Moderate to difficult. Duration: Ongoing.*

11. **Cascading of rejected manuscripts from one journal to another.** [NEW] While certainly not a new practice, the past few years, and the past 24-36 months in particular, have witnessed many more concerted efforts to keep submitted papers within a portfolio of journals. Developing the systems to accomplish this, the editorial practices to support it, and the policies to explain it to authors, are all new costs and initiatives. The practice is not without its costs, as well, but it beats having to source everything anew for each title. *Expense: $. Difficulty: Highest at first. Duration: Constant.*

12. **Acceptance of submissions.** [ENHANCED] Luckily, some submissions are really good, and they deserve more attention. That’s when a lot more work starts. But notice how much has gone on before even the first paper is accepted. But accepting a paper is becoming more complex, as mandates,
disclosures, various ethical aspects of authorship attestation, and so forth gain prominence, and as integrations with online infrastructure (e.g., ORCID) becomes the norm. Most of these are covered below. Expense: $ (act of acceptance only). Difficulty: Easy. Duration: Ongoing.

13. Tracking of submissions throughout. [ENHANCED] Infrastructure at the submission level is becoming more complex, in keeping with more complex submission requirements. But systems and technologies aren’t enough. Authors need a lot of handholding, materials can spring surprises on you, new requests from editors can come in, and so forth. The increasing utilization of cascading review systems is also increasing complexity and cost. Expense: $-$$. Difficulty: Moderate. Duration: Endless.

14. Tracking changes in the authorship environment. In many fields, rules around authorship requirements, funding disclosures, technical requirements, and funder requirements can change, and authors often don’t know this has occurred. Publishers have to keep track of these changes so they can provide useful advice and plan for the implications. This includes keeping authors compliant with funder mandates and ensuring domain normalization through compliance with broader standards. Expense: $. Difficulty: Easy. Duration: Sporadic.

15. Plagiarism detection. [ENHANCED] Thanks to new tools and expectations, comparing manuscripts using plagiarism detection software has become the norm for many publishers, yet it often ends with steps involving human judgment. Other functions have included figure manipulation detection initiatives created and propagated by publishers. Expense: $. Difficulty: Moderate. Duration: Usually sporadic.

16. Rights registration and protection. [ENHANCED] While many publishers allow licenses to suffice, most still require or prefer copyright transfer. This is a highly valuable service for authors, I believe, as it alleviates them of monitoring something that has peak value when published, and is otherwise a burden to manage. Surveys seem to bear this out. New licensing options, and their shifting nature, also adds to the burden of documenting and monitoring. Expense: $$$. Difficulty: Easy (registration) to difficult (protection). Duration: Ongoing.

17. Recruitment and retention of editors and reviewers. [ENHANCED] Editors and reviewers don’t grown on trees. They are usually busy people with a lot of demands on their time and professional options. How do you get them to head up a journal or provide expert review of submitted manuscripts? New systems being implemented to grant and track credit for reviewers and editors add to the complexity and management overhead here. Expense: $-$$$$$. Difficulty: Moderate to difficult. Duration: Sporadic.

18. Care and feeding of reviewers. [ENHANCED] A list of reviewers isn’t enough. They need to be acknowledged, communicated with, helped, and supported. Publishers are good at this, or try to be. Now, they also have to integrate with more new reviewer-credit systems, which are coming up to speed and being adopted. Expense: $. Difficulty: Easy. Duration: Consistent.

19. Training of peer reviewers. Peer reviewers have to be trained. They don’t arrive knowing how to use the systems, either technical or categorical, and they often deviate from one another in unhelpful ways within both systems. Expense: $$. Difficulty: Moderate. Duration: Sporadic.

20. Manage statistical reviewers and reviews. This varies by domain. Some don’t use statistical reviewers, especially when direct observations are possible. Others, like medicine and public health, use them all the time. They are often more integral than peer reviewers, and have significant decision-making authority. Expense: $$$. Difficulty: Easy. Duration: Ongoing.

21. Manage technical reviewers and reviews. See above.

22. Training of editors. It may be surprising, but a subject-matter expert needs to learn how to be a good editor. This comes naturally enough to some, but others struggle with it, and a few never quite get it. Staff provide a lot of training and monitoring, and this is an area of some confidentiality as to what

23. Editorial meetings. [ENHANCED] Another level of editorial support, this often involves meetings that include selected high-level reviewers, a tier of editors, statisticians or technical reviewers, and editors. Staff have to plan, run, and manage these, along with editorial leaders. New expectations of a global editorial workforce – for diversity of opinions, to attract papers, and to ensure market presence – are increasing expenses and logistical complexity. Expense: $$-$-$$$$$. Difficulty: Easy to difficult. Duration: Sporadic.

24. Management of peer review process. The peer review process isn’t static. New elements come in — like new disclosure rules, new grading or evaluation approaches, and new media forms. How these are integrated matters a good deal, and it takes work. Expense: $$-. Difficulty: Easy to moderate. Duration: Constant.

25. Ethics investigations. [NEW] When someone alleges malfeasance or misconduct, publishers lead the investigation. While not always productive, these investigations are always time-consuming and complex, involving multiple stakeholders within the publishing organization and at outside organizations. If lawyers get involved, hold on. Expense: $$-$-$$$$$. Difficulty: Moderate to difficult. Duration: Sporadic.

26. Staff training. [NEW] With all the changes in publishing practices, policies, technologies, and business models, training staff is more important than ever, especially as they are interacting with authors, readers, and editors. Expense: $$-. Difficulty: Moderate. Duration: Ongoing.

27. Conflicts of interest and disclosures. As noted above, conflicts of interest and disclosures are becoming more important in many fields (and should be very important in most). Keeping current with the state of the art, collecting and organizing the forms from dozens of authors, matching them with manuscripts, and following up with reluctant or forgetful authors all requires a lot of work. Expense: $. Difficulty: Variable. Duration: Constant.

28. Implement and enforce editorial policies and procedures. There is an increasingly long list of editorial policies to implement and enforce, which has led to much longer and more convoluted instructions to authors. Enforcing these for each manuscript is hard work and requires diligent, trained, experienced staff. Policies often need to be revisited frequently, and instructions to authors modified regularly. Expense: $. Difficulty: Difficult. Duration: Constant.

29. Compliance. [NEW] Increasingly, journals are serving as key players in ensuring researcher compliance with funder and institutional access policies. For instance, approximately 75% of what comes into PubMed Central comes from publishers. Without publishers, PMC would be far less useful and viable. CHORUS, which serves many US funding agencies and can support other public or private funders, was established by publishers, and is maintained by publishers. Policies are constantly being updated and revised to help authors stay in compliance. Expense: $$$. Difficulty: Moderate. Duration: Continuous.

30. Author attestations. Scandals around fake or shadow authorship have made it necessary to get authors to attest that they indeed wrote the paper submitted under their name, and were in a position to control the data and write freely. With growing author lists, this can involve a lot of attestations for the average paper. Expense: $. Difficulty: Moderate. Duration: Ongoing.

31. Dealing with authorship problems. Authors get things wrong. Authors make mistakes. Authors commit fraud. Editors and publishers deal with allegations, try to understand their veracity, collaborate on what to do if claims have merit, and then implement a response — perhaps a retraction, perhaps an expression of concern, perhaps letters to the editor. In extreme cases, authors can be banned from publishing for a period of time, and the publisher has to keep track of these bans. Expense: $$-$-$$$$$. Difficulty: Difficult. Duration: Sporadic.
32. **Copy editing, proofreading, and styling of materials. [ENHANCED]** Generally thought of as a lighter form of editing, there is a spectrum—from extremely light to very rigorous. A good copy editor or proofreader can catch important inconsistencies and errors, flaws in logic, and problems with data. Applying uniform style guides also aid readers while occasionally revealing problems in a manuscript. Expense: $-$-$$. Difficulty: Moderate. Duration: Constant.

33. **Language and substantive editing. [NEW]** Some journals employ experienced subject-matter editors who have gained such deep experience in a field that they are able to push authors to be clear and precise, revise their writing with confidence, and catch errors and logical elisions. Manuscripts handled by these editors are typically heavily revised, shorter, clearer, and easier to read at the end of the day. But they don’t come cheap. And in the humanities, the work in this area is extremely important, to both the quality of the final work and the reputation of the press and authors/editors. Expense: $$-$$$. Difficulty: Difficult. Duration: Constant.

34. **Illustration.** Some high-end journals provide illustration staff to authors of selected papers, particularly review articles or review journals. Some improve the basic illustrations authors provide, for the sake of clarity and consistency. Expense: $$. Difficulty: Moderate to difficult. Duration: Ongoing.

35. **Art handling.** Authors don’t always follow instructions, sometimes submit the wrong figures, sometimes submit too many figures, or need to supply new figures after review and editing have uncovered ways to improve their materials. Expense: $. Difficulty: Moderate. Duration: Sporadic.


37. **Layout and composition.** Whether the journal in question is still printed, the PDF is still in high demand, and typesetting and layout still occur. Luckily, computers make this relatively easy, but it’s not automatic. Figure-sizing, pagination, and other factors demand knowledgeable human intervention and skills. Expense: $$-$-$$. Difficulty: Moderate. Duration: Ongoing.

38. **Design print and various online versions.** Design for journals has exploded as an issue, with print designs revisited in light of online trends, online designs at the home page and article level in flux, and mobile/tablet/social designs all needing attention. Keeping these complementary and coordinated takes a lot of work, not to mention the creative process behind the designs. Finally, some journals design each issue in print and online to some degree, to improve user experience. Expense: $$-$$$. Difficulty: Moderate to difficult. Duration: Sporadic to ongoing.

39. **XML generation and DTD migration.** Now, in addition to making pages, publishers spit out XML, and track DTD migrations as they occur. DTD migrations can be minor (new elements to reflect a change somewhere in the pipeline) or extreme (a new DTD requirement, like the NLM DTD was). Expense: $$-$-$$. Difficulty: Difficult. Duration: Ongoing (generation) and sporadic (migration).

40. **Format migrations.** Just in the past two decades, we’ve moved from SGML to XML to NLM DTD and now to JATS. Flipping your content from one to the other is not a trivial exercise, and it’s not cheap. It takes planning, money, and management to do it right. Content stores are becoming larger, as well. Expense: $$-$$$. Difficulty: Difficult. Duration: Longer than you think.

41. **Tagging. [ENHANCED]** To generate good metadata, articles and elements are often tagged using either semantic, custom taxonomies, or both. Sometimes, tagging is manual, sometimes automated, and sometimes a little of both. But it doesn’t happen all by itself. And it isn’t maintained, enhanced, expanded, migrated, or corrected by itself, either. The emergence of new social collaboration networks like Mendeley, Academia.edu, and ResearchGate are adding pressures to tag every element, from figures to PDFs. Expense: $$-$-$$. Difficulty: Moderate. Duration: Ongoing.


43. **Search engine optimization. [ENHANCED]** Ah, Google, how you vex us! The black magic of SEO
can drain teams and budgets. And Google keeps things interesting. Just in the past year, Google began discounting content that wasn’t optimized for a mobile version or use https. Many publishers who failed the test (https://www.google.com/webmasters/tools/mobile-friendly/) had to perform a lot of expensive work or see their traffic decline sharply. But authors want their papers to be found, so publishers stay on top of this. Expense: $$$.

Difficulty: Moderate to difficult. Duration: Sporadic.

44. Search engine marketing. [NEW] More and more content means more noise, so some publishers are cutting through the clutter with search engine marketing (SEM). While the cost of acquisition remains high, the lifetime value can make sense, and practice often drives down the cost-per-acquisition. Expense: $$. Difficulty: Moderate. Duration: Sporadic to ongoing.

45. Integrate and track metrics and, increasingly, altmetrics. The Internet throws off data, and now publishers are running more data-intensive businesses. In addition, these data are shared with more constituencies, from librarians (COUNTER reports) to authors (usage metrics and altmetrics). Expense: $$. Difficulty: Moderate to difficult. Duration: Ongoing.

46. Rapid publication practices. More common than ever, most journals have a custom path for rapid publication. This often involves special staff and processes. Expense: $$. Difficulty: Moderate to difficult. Duration: Sporadic.

47. Data publication. [NEW] Data is the new frontier of research publication, and publishers are the least constrained players (compared to governments, funders, and universities), making them a driving force in finding new ways to create the kind of transparency, infrastructure, incentives, and requirements that will make data publication work. Expense: $$-$$$$.

Difficulty: Too soon to tell. Duration: Probably ongoing.

48. Publication. Ah, at last, we’re published! This involves more now than ever (the next few steps at least). Expense: $$$. Difficulty: In total, difficult. Duration: Ongoing.

49. Printing. Yes, many journals still print, and it’s not getting less complicated, as presses, paper mills, and mailing facilities adjust to a shrinking print world. Expense: $$-$$$$.

Difficulty: Moderate. Duration: Ongoing.

50. Physical distribution. [ENHANCED] Mailing is more complex in some ways, because the mail streams are less robust, and public postal systems are struggling in the face of austerity and changing consumer economics. Reduced print runs have made postal expenses lumpy. Expense: $$-$$$$.

Difficulty: Moderate. Duration: Ongoing.

51. Vendor management. [NEW] As publishing has grown more complex and technology-driven, and as cost pressures have mounted with limited library and research budgets, publishers have had to outsource more. This has created a new, complex, and not inexpensive internal task of managing all these vendors. Given that many are international, travel is sometimes involved, and issues can arise at all hours. Expense: $$-$$. Difficulty: Easy to difficult. Duration: Constant with spikes of activity.

52. Media relations and publicity. Press coverage drives awareness, and important authors of important studies expect to be in the mediasphere. Also, if there’s a scandal, you’d better know who to call and what to say. Expense: $$$. Difficulty: Easy to excruciating. Duration: Sporadic.

53. Social media distribution and management. [ENHANCED] Twitter and Facebook have created a new alerting expectation and outlet. YouTube is increasingly valuable. More editorial and marketing time is being spent on these outlets now. New technologies to measure things like sentiment, traffic sourcing, and value are being taken up, requiring staff time, even dedicated staff. Expense: $$. Difficulty: Easy to moderate. Duration: Ongoing.

54. Depositing content and data. [NEW] Downstream deposit of articles and data to help authors comply with funder requirements or community norms is a growing function of publishers, who are responsible for the majority of compliance overall. Initiatives like GenBank and others wouldn’t be nearly as robust if publishers were not requiring authors to deposit data as part of the publication
process or, in some cases, providing deposit services on behalf of authors. Requires setup and monitoring of related production systems and workflows, and ongoing management, as well as occasional interventions when things go off the rails. Expense: $-$$$. Difficulty: Easy to moderate. Duration: Ongoing.

55. Integrating new standards. [NEW] As new standards emerge (e.g., CHORUS, ORCID, Credit, FundRef, institutional identifiers), these have to be integrated into various parts of the workflow and technology stack. Revisions to standards, which are inevitable and unpredictable, require repeated work. Expense: $-$$$$. Difficulty: Moderate. Duration: Episodic.

56. Third-party licensing and negotiation. [ENHANCED] Your direct audience is not your only audience. Some companies want to pay you to include the content in their offerings, or try to sell the content into adjacent markets. Negotiating and managing these deals and relationships takes time. Aggregators like EBSCO, OVID, ProQuest, and JSTOR remain popular, as well. Expense: $. Difficulty: Moderate. Duration: Sporadic.

57. Hosting and archiving. Hosting platforms can be expensive because they support many of the functions above. Archiving is a new expectation that comes with the digital age, and one that is not trivial or simple to do well. However, solutions provided by the likes of CLOCKSS and Portico certainly help. Expense: $$-$$$$$. Difficulty: Moderate. Duration: Sporadic.

58. Platform upgrades and migrations. [ENHANCED] Ah, the fun of either upgrading your platform or moving to another provider. It’s a lot of work, and the fear of downtime makes it a delicate task. Recent changes in the landscape have accelerated activity for many publishers, as they are evaluating their options. Expense: $$$$$. Difficulty: Hair-raising. Duration: Longer than you think.

59. Native search engine improvements. A bane to every journal web site, the native search engine is an ongoing source of strife, as users, editors, authors, and others constantly find “problems” and report them, expecting easy fixes. The variability of the underlying content combined with the variability of user search practices makes this a difficult area to resolve. Expense: $-$$. Difficulty: Moderate to difficult. Duration: Sporadic.

60. Journals packaging and sales. Increasingly, journals are sold in bundles or as database packages, at least to certain customer segments (institutions, corporations). Publishers have to understand the sales process and approach, package and price their offerings to match, and conduct and complete sales. Database offerings are distinctly more complex to create. Expense: $-$$$$$. Difficulty: Easy to difficult. Duration: Variable.

61. Comment moderation. [ENHANCED] Sure, nobody comments on articles — until they do. Then what? The publisher has to staff it and establish policies around it. The technology itself isn’t cheap, and making it work for academic publishing adds work and expense. Expense: $-$$. Difficulty: Easy. Duration: Sporadic.

62. Implementing and managing interlinking services. With the Web, linking became a new expectation, and publishers had to work with vendors to implement linking options at various points in their content sets and across their service offerings. These links need to be reevaluated periodically, and some of the data they throw off tracked. Expense: $. Difficulty: Easy. Duration: Sporadic.

63. Anti-piracy efforts. [NEW] Authors, editors, and publishers are all concerned with piracy, and publishers are on the front line. Identifying pirated materials, sending takedown notices, enforcing these, and reviewing related reports all take effort and attention. Occasionally, a piracy incident escalates. On a broader scale, publishers collaborate to ensure they operate in a framework that decreases the likelihood of piracy. Expense: $. Difficulty: Usually low, sometimes high. Duration: Sporadic.

64. Supplement proposals. Some journals allow supplements. Dealing with proposals alone is a chore. Publishing supplements delves into many of the steps that precede and follow. But because these can
come from core authors, they have to be handled delicately. Expense: $. Difficulty: Political. Duration: Sporadic.

65. **Managing or implementing CE/CME/CLE or other educational offerings.** Many journals have integrated or related educational offerings, either in the health, medicine, or legal space. Others support less formal certification courses. Developing, implementing, and managing these programs can be involved and requires a lot of meticulous work and interactions with editors and oversight bodies. Expense: $$-$$$$. Difficulty: Moderate to difficult. Duration: Ongoing, with periods of intense effort.

66. **Analytics and abuse monitoring.** Is your site under attack? Has someone stolen a paper and reversed its meaning on a commercial site? A good publisher watches for these things, and has a network that will notify when there’s a problem. And then there are the more mundane analytics editors and business units need. Expense: $$-$$$$. Difficulty: Moderate. Duration: Sporadic.

67. **Managing and protecting financial records. [ENHANCED]** Yes, publishers and their platforms get hacked, so everyone involved has to create firewalls, protect credit card transactions, guard payroll records, and so forth. The pace of these attacks have increased as our modern Cold War in cyberspace escalates, and as hackers continue to find success in other sectors. Expense: $$-$$$$. Difficulty: Increasing. Duration: Constant.

68. **Managing and protecting subscriber records.** If you have subscribers, you have to keep their records from prying eyes, or risk violating your privacy policy. Expense: $. Difficulty: Increasing. Duration: Ongoing.

69. **Managing and protecting editorial records. [ENHANCED]** Peer reviews are confidential. Records showing which manuscripts you rejected are confidential and definitely touchy. With new entrants allowing reviews to be posted or anonymous conversations about papers, monitoring these third party sites is becoming another chore. Expense: $. Difficulty: Increasing. Duration: Ongoing.

70. **Responding to legal actions.** Sometimes, authors are sued, and publishers get entangled. Or vice-versa. In either case, things get interesting. Expense: $$-$$$$. Difficulty: Variable, usually difficult. Duration: Sporadic.

71. **Basic management functions.** Publishers have to do HR, legal, facilities, corporate compliance, and so forth. Expense: $$-$$$$. Difficulty: Easy to difficult. Duration: Constant.

72. **Construct annual budgets and financial projections.** A basic function overlooked on this list until now, every year entails publishing staff working in a coordinated manner to submit their expense budgets and revenue projections, then responding as senior management provides further guidance. The process has become more complex in the online world. Expense: $. Difficulty: Increasing. Duration: Annual.

73. **Extended management functions.** Many publishers exist inside a society of some sort, and have extended management roles that include internal reporting, strategic consultation, internal resource negotiations, basic office interactions, and more complicated contracts. Expense: $. Difficulty: Easy to difficult. Duration: Constant.

74. **Society/association partnership.** [NEW] The financial support a publisher provides a society or association is only part of the support they lend. Most publishers actively work to help drive membership and the society’s agenda, serve as a supplemental marketing wing, help shape strategy, create opportunities for members (peer review training, publication opportunities, editorial opportunities), and lend additional business expertise. Expense: $. Difficulty: Variable. Duration: Ongoing.

75. **Organizational education.** [NEW] Various stakeholders in an organization – from colleagues to leadership to governance – can bring to the table stereotypical or outdated concepts of what publishers to and what publishing is now. In a high-change environment, it is more important than ever to educate the entire organization about what is going on in publishing. Expense: $. Difficulty:
76. **Board interactions.** Publishers have Boards of Directors or Trustees, and interact with these bodies around budgetary, strategic, and other issues. As strategies have become less certain, these interactions are becoming more frequent and perhaps more fraught. A good Board can provide strong support for good strategies and leadership. *Expense: $$. Difficulty: Easy to difficult. Duration: Ongoing.*

77. **Create and maintain e-commerce systems.** Whatever your revenue model (subscription, OA [APCs], or some hybrid [page charges, color charges, subscription]), you have to take online orders. These systems can be simple or very complex, but they have to be robust enough to comply with credit card processing requirements, which have become much more stringent. In addition, the international scope of e-commerce has many publishers wrestling with VAT compliance. *Expense: $$-$$$$$. Difficulty: Difficult. Duration: Ongoing.*

78. **Sell advertising, reprints, and single copies.** Not all publishers or journals can make a significant amount of money from selling ads, reprints, or single articles, but when they can, their subscription prices or APCs can be — and often are — lower. Therefore, there is a mutual win if this can occur — publishers diversify their risk, readers or authors pay less. *Expense: $$. Difficulty: Increasing. Duration: Ongoing.*

79. **Manage sales forces.** Whether you sell subscriptions, advertising, ancillary products, sponsorships, or licenses, you have either an internal, outside, or mixed sales force. *Expense: $$. Difficulty: Increasing. Duration: Ongoing.*

80. **Reporting. [ENHANCED]** There are days when it seems the reporting will never end. Marketers must report on the efficacy of their campaigns. Production departments must report on their performance. Publishers with must report regularly to their society partners, university owners, parent corporations, or shareholders. Reports are due to advertisers on impressions and clicks, reports are due to librarians on COUNTER traffic. Care must be taken to report accurately and sufficiently for taxation and other government requirements. Non-profits must report annual 990s and other required documents — some novice non-profit journals have lost their non-profit status because they didn’t comply with this obligation, but it’s part of the deal. *Expense: $. Difficulty: Moderate. Duration: Ongoing.*

81. **Interact with agents for institutional and individual sales. [ENHANCED]** In addition to direct sales forces, agents provide another layer of sales support, and often offer different services and approaches, from telemarketing to storefronts. And when agents like SWETS go belly up, publishers have a track record of stepping in and picking up the pieces. *Expense: $-$$$$$. Difficulty: Easy. Duration: Sporadic.*

82. **Create or integrate with educational offerings.** In some fields, CME or CE credits are commonly tied to journal publication in one way or another. In others, separate publishing initiatives are built around educational modalities of some sort, often relying on a journal or periodical product as their backbone. *Expense: $$. Difficulty: Moderate to difficult. Duration: Sporadic.*

83. **Funding academia. [NEW]** Some academic publishers are affiliated with universities, and provide direct funding. Others provide funding assistance through scholarships or unrestricted grants, or through matching funds. *Expense: $-$$. Difficulty: Easy. Duration: Sporadic to ongoing.*

84. **Conduct financial projections and set prices accordingly. [ENHANCED]** Aside from annual rollover budgets, Publishers have to constantly reforecast and create projections based on changes in the market. New product development, funding of upgrades and infrastructure, hiring new personnel into new roles, and many other functions require financial projections, which can lead to price increases or decreases, depending on the situation. Like every organization, Publishers want to be around for a long time, and that requires planning. *Expense: $. Difficulty: Moderate to difficult.*
85. **Maintain facilities.** Publishers have to live somewhere, and often the expectation is that they have inspiring and impressive offices. It’s part of the prestige factor so important to the mutual aspirations of authors and editors as well. They should be at least as nice as the universities where so many work, or so it seems. **Expense:** $$-$$$$ . **Difficulty:** Easy to difficult. **Duration:** Sporadic.

86. **Engage in product development.** Things change. Little changes like the Internet or the iPhone drive product changes. Somewhere, no matter what technology is emerging, some publisher somewhere is experimenting with it. In some cases, entire new product suites are developed and launched, as well. **Expense:** $$-$$$$ . **Difficulty:** Moderate to difficult. **Duration:** Sporadic or ongoing.

87. **Experiment with new technologies.** [ENHANCED] This one goes back a good many years, from podcasts to Kindles to mobile to PowerPoints to RSS, journals have been tinkering with new technologies. Today, entities like Digital Science, SAGE investing in PeerJ and Publons, AAAS acquiring PRE, and Elsevier investing in Sciencescape and acquiring Mendeley all point to a growing trend toward aggressive experimentation by publishers, to the benefit of the overall scholarly communication system. **Expense:** $$-$$$ . **Difficulty:** Variable. **Duration:** Sporadic, moving to ongoing.

88. **Conduct market research.** [ENHANCED] This informs so many aspects of editorial and business planning, and success stories are becoming more common, increasing the interest in new and ongoing initiatives to understand customers of all types. **Expense:** $$-$$$ . **Difficulty:** Moderate to difficult. **Duration:** Should be ongoing, usually sporadic.

89. **Conduct renewal and retention marketing.** [ENHANCED] Marketing and sales go hand in hand. Renewals keep the audience in place for future authors to reach. As marketing has moved online, new technologies have created new capabilities, requiring new measurement and management approaches. **Expense:** $$. **Difficulty:** Moderate. **Duration:** Ongoing.

90. **Conduct new customer marketing.** [ENHANCED] Growing the audience is also important, no matter the business model employed. SEM (covered above), social, email, and online marketing are all becoming more sophisticated, and the space is competitive. **Expense:** $$$$-$$$$$. **Difficulty:** Increasing. **Duration:** Ongoing.

91. **Create, manage, and monitor customer data stores and databases.** [NEW] Customer data has become central to publishers, whether those customers are authors, institutions, members, agents, advertisers, or individuals. As new players and requirements emerge, and new data sources are developed, supplementing customer data becomes a new requirement to remain leading-edge and relevant. **Expense:** $$-$$$$$. **Difficulty:** Difficult. **Duration:** Ongoing.

92. **Buy and rent lists for various email and snail-mail marketing initiatives.** To grow the audience, marketing experts have to source and secure lists of potential customers, and track results over time. **Expense:** $$-$$$ . **Difficulty:** Moderate. **Duration:** Sporadic.

93. **Comply with privacy, email CAN-SPAM, and other regulations affecting publishing.** There are a lot of standards and rules about online advertising and marketing, and publishers know and live by these. **Expense:** $. **Difficulty:** Increasing. **Duration:** Sporadic.

94. **Pay for and comply with terms of publisher insurance policies.** Yes, authors can do things that make it even riskier for publishers presenting new findings to the world on their behalf, so we buy insurance. **Expense:** $$. **Difficulty:** Easy. **Duration:** Sporadic.

95. **Work together to solve more general access and fairness issues.** [ENHANCED] As pointed out in an earlier post by Alice Meadows, publishers have a great track record of working together to solve perceived inequities or general problems, from DOIs to CrossRef to CrossCheck to HINARI to Research4Life to INASP to free access to low-income countries to FundRef to CHORUS to Dryad to CASRAI, publishers generally aspire to fairness and accessibility, and have created an admirable legacy of working to implement these aspirations. **Expense:** $$-$$$ . **Difficulty:** Easy to difficult. **Duration:**
Ongoing.

96. **Benchmark and compare notes.** Publishers like to check in with other publishers to make sure we’re not falling behind, to get advice when the going gets rough, and to see if there are better ways to do things. We attend meetings and webinars to remain on the forefront. In a rapidly changing environment, the time needed to do this is increasing. **Expense:** $$. **Difficulty:** Easy to difficult. **Duration:** Sporadic.

This year, because of the large number of items, I wanted to also add a quick index to the work, with a few categories and my best effort to slot items into these categories. This is not a perfect exercise, especially as, over time, we’ve seen editorial mixing more with technology, publishing mixing more with community, and so forth. Boundary items are categorized strictly and not generously, for clarity and to prevent an absolute muddle.

**Editorial:** 1, 2, 4, 9, 10-25, 27, 30-40, 41-48, 52-54, 59, 61, 63-66

**Marketing:** 1, 3, 6, 14, 43, 44, 48, 49, 50, 52, 53, 60, 86-92

**Community:** 1-4, 6, 7, 9, 22, 23, 25-27, 29-31, 39, 42, 47-50, 52, 61-63, 74-76, 79-83, 86, 88, 94-95

**Technology:** 8, 40-45, 48, 51, 54-59, 62, 66, 77-78, 80, 82, 87, 92

**Finances and Business:** 5, 7, 48, 51, 56, 60, 67-73, 75, 77-81, 83-86, 93

In the big picture, having publishers doing these things means that scientists and policymakers don’t have to do them and can focus on doing their work. We represent a set of trades and associated professionals who do all these things on their behalf.

Any updates you’d like to propose for next time? The comments thread is open below.

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**About Kent Anderson**

I am the CEO of RedLink and RedLink Network, a past-President of SSP, and the founder of the Scholarly Kitchen. I’ve worked as Publisher at AAAS/Science, CEO/Publisher of the JBJS, Inc., a publishing executive at the Massachusetts Medical Society, Publishing Director of the New England Journal of Medicine, and Director of Medical Journals at the American Academy of Pediatrics. Opinions on social media or blogs are my own.

*View all posts by Kent Anderson »*

**Discussion**

1. Will be saved.

I did not see a statement to the effect of launching new journals in new fields.

POSTED BY HARVEY KANE | FEB 1, 2016, 8:06 AM
○ See points 1 and 2.

POSTED BY DAVID CROTTY | FEB 1, 2016, 9:32 AM

2. welcome back!

POSTED BY ARNOUD DE KEMP | FEB 1, 2016, 9:40 AM
3. It might seem to be splitting hairs, but many of the points seem to fall within the domain of the academics who edit and/or review or support the journals in many other ways that are not clearly differentiated or credited in this list. And while there is a constant theme for the publishers to be profitable, there seems to be a focus on the off-setting “costs” incurred while the publishers have never been forthcoming on the “slim” margins that they obtain, a point raised by and partly responsible for the entire OA movement and part of the rationale for Lever, reported on in this blog.

The idea that publishers “uncover” emergent journal opportunities seems to be mutually beneficial and a stretch at best.

Perhaps the list could be rewritten in the style of Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s Sonnet 43

POSTED BY TABELES | FEB 1, 2016, 9:46 AM
○ I’m not sure you can separate out editors from the publication process or from the publisher. First, there are many publishers that directly employ professional editors for their journals. Second, there are many journals that are self-published by research societies, and their editors are serving as part of those societies.

As for profits, it’s important to recognize that not all publishers are the big 5, and that margins vary enormously. Many publishers are not-for-profit or are part of research institutions and as such, many make information on their finances publicly available.

As someone who has launched multiple journals in new fields, the ideas do often come from the publishers rather than from the academics who are authoring papers and editing the journal. Often a publisher is able to have a broader view of the field, and if you’re doing good, regular bibliometric analysis, you can see trends emerge. Of course you take this to your editors and the academics themselves for further development, but it’s not always a one way street.

POSTED BY DAVID CROTTY | FEB 1, 2016, 10:52 AM
○ I think the continuous focus on “margins” obscures an important point about finances, especially considering that many newer OA publishers also have double-digit margins (some purportedly higher than Elsevier’s, as well). This finance fact is that publishers are, in the broader world, smaller businesses that need a certain amount of margin as a buffer against uncertainty. For
non-profits, this is especially true, as debt financing is not something they’re going to undertake lightly, and if their cash flows are negative, not easily (or cheaply).

This topic arose at a meeting last year, when a speaker was criticizing the margins publishers make. But looked at in terms of absolute numbers (currency — dollars or Euros), you get a different picture. For example, when you look at an automaker like Volkswagen, which has single-digit margins, the company is so huge that even one three-month period of these low-margin profits could provide VW with enough money to buy one of the large commercial publishers out, dollar for dollar. Times that by four, and VW could afford quite a spending spree. But they’re low margin. Does that put them on the side of the angels?

Even small OA and non-profit publishers try to have margins of 10% or better because that’s a good way for these conservative organizations to ensure enough money to buffer uncertainty. Remember, 90% of scholarly publishers generate revenues of $25 million or less each year. If you are a $10 million revenue publisher, and you have a 15% margin, you’re creating a buffer of $1.5M each year. One failed product, one major vendor implosion, one lawsuit, one round of staff cuts, one new product launch, one platform migration, or one new Editor search and hiring process can eat into that buffer significantly. And there’s nothing messier for a business than going into the red.

POSTED BY KENT ANDERSON | FEB 1, 2016, 4:02 PM
○ Before one starts discussing margins one must define what a margin is and what is included in the cost side of the equation. Also, one must discuss just what are earnings and what are profits.

POSTED BY HARVEY KANE | FEB 1, 2016, 7:25 PM
4. See also, 60 Things Academic Book Publishers Do:

POSTED BY DAVID CROTTY | FEB 1, 2016, 10:53 AM
5. I love this list. It’s a great reminder that publishing is more than launching a web site. No doubt there will be people who say authors don’t need or want half this stuff, but that is actually not true. Many authors do...enough that we keep doing them. If you stop doing any of these things, you hear from unhappy authors, readers, or libraries about it.

POSTED BY ANGELA COCHRAN | FEB 1, 2016, 1:41 PM
6. Publishing is a complex industry and scholarly publishers provide a great service, delivering a narrative of research being carried out. We will always need good publishers.

But it is time to ask whether the published “paper” or narrative should still be the primary conduit for communicating research. I think not. Many of the points mentioned above actually slow down publication. So we need a system whereby discoveries are communicated openly and immediately and the right people are given credit. Unfortunately the pursuit of the dreaded “impact factor” enslaves researchers to this 350 year old system.

I dream of a community based portal a bit like StackExchange, where science moves fast with contributions from the community, and where credit is given where credit is due. The “narrative” follows with the familiar abstract, references, etc. So science is communicated at the speed of the internet, and good publishers flourish and charge for their service.
POSTED BY KAVEH BAZARGAN (@KAVEH1000) | FEB 3, 2016, 6:18 PM
- I am not too sure that what you desire already occurs. I have seen emails flourishing relating findings to colleagues prior to publication in any form. The caveat is that you have to be in the loop and those who are “on top of their game” are among the cognoscenti.

The published paper is for the record. The impact factor is for tenure/grants and shows that one has published in a journal that is respected because what it publishes is cited by others.

POSTED BY HARVEY KANE | FEB 3, 2016, 9:37 PM
- What I am suggesting is that the impact factor has zero effect on tenure or grants. As you say the system of these exchanges is now informal and limited to discussion amongst the elite. If that discussion were formalized, then the very peers who now partake in peer review, can vote for contributions of others in the field. The voting would itself be a measure of the contributions made.

This would also give recognition to peer reviewers and other contributors like programmers (who might not write many papers). Right now, unless you have publication in the conventional form, you are a nobody in academia.

POSTED BY KAVEH BAZARGAN (@KAVEH1000) | FEB 4, 2016, 4:00 AM
- What you say is so, one is nobody because one haven’t done anything that has passed the vetting process. One can complain about the vetting process but that is just complaining. As for voting, one opens the door to great corruption when the public, even the limited one in our environment, is asked to caste a vote – voting is as much an emotional act as a intellect one.

POSTED BY HARVEY KANE | FEB 4, 2016, 8:28 AM
- Please look at how StackExchange works. The voting is by the community, and each voter has proved they are eligible to vote. It is accurate, granular up- or down-vote by the community. I believe that is true “peer review”, i.e. real time, instant review by the community directly interested in the subject.

I repeat that I love publishing and I want good publishers to continue and to flourish, but they should no longer be the “gatekeepers” of research, but report it.

POSTED BY KAVEH BAZARGAN (@KAVEH1000) | FEB 4, 2016, 1:36 PM
- The Stack system is not vetting it is a reaction to something. The review process is rather different in that suggestions, questions etc are offered and addressed.

Publishers are not gatekeepers the academic editor(s) and reviewers are the gate keepers as to what get published.

POSTED BY HARVEY KANE | FEB 4, 2016, 1:51 PM
7. One thing that publishers do which is somewhat peripheral to their core activities, but is a significant contributor the scholarly landscape is help to fund events like conferences (typically through sponsorship) and research, such as the T&F Peer Review survey.

POSTED BY MARKTJCARDEN | FEB 17, 2016, 4:48 PM
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