

Precocious dinosaur or preeminent electronic presence?

Barbara Meyers's introductory remarks to the Publishers Panel at the 1995 Charleston Conference asked, "Have publishers become precocious dinosaurs?" [1]. The publishers represented on the panel were asked to base their remarks on the following premise: "Publishers need to go electronic or perish, right?" The Medical Library Association (MLA), as a publisher, is not in the same league as the American Medical Association or Elsevier, but many of the same environmental factors facing these publishing giants are affecting MLA in general and the publication of the *Bulletin* in particular. Highlighting MLA's journal through tables of contents and abstracts, disseminating pre-publication papers for editorial comment (or peer-review comment), and providing an alternate means of full-text distribution on the World Wide Web are issues of ongoing interest and concern to MLA members. As a new volume of the *Bulletin* begins, our focus will be identifying and publishing the most important content for readers and finding an appropriate balance of electronic access and archival distribution on paper. We hope we are not a precocious dinosaur, but neither are we a preeminent electronic presence on the Web.

Care and feeding: assuring quality content

A new editorial team has begun the work of ensuring the continuance and evolution of MLA's unique and enduring *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association*. While the team is new, the effort is the same, namely to publish (paper, electronic, or both) the best and most respected research journal in health sciences librarianship. The new team is lucky to have the opportunity to build on the work of a distinguished former editor, Naomi

Broering. Ms. Broering's focus on research and the publication of special topical symposia will be a continued emphasis of the *Bulletin*. Efforts to highlight research articles in collaboration with MLA's Research Section will be a focus in 1997. The team of associate editors has been augmented to include three additional focus areas of health sciences librarianship: MLA history (in anticipation of the 1998 centennial), international health sciences librarianship, and hospital librarianship.

A routine change occurs every year as eight new members of the twenty-four-member *Bulletin* Editorial Board begin their three-year terms at the close of the Medical Library Association Annual Meeting. The work of the Editorial Board is vitally important to the publication of the *Bulletin*. The Editorial Board completes a thorough peer review of every paper submitted to the *Bulletin*, providing valuable feedback to the editor, but most importantly providing thoughtful comments, error correction, and suggestions for improvement for the authors. This is an appropriate opportunity to welcome the new members of the board and to thank both new and continuing members for their dedication and hard work on behalf of the *Bulletin*. Joining new members of the Editorial Board is Julia Ann Kelly, Bio-Medical Library, University of Minnesota, who has been appointed senior associate editor of the *Bulletin*.

In May 1996 a less routine change occurred with the creation of three new focus areas for the *Bulletin* and appointment of new associate editors to fill positions related to hospital librarianship, international health sciences librarianship, and MLA history. Michele S. Klein, Children's Hospital of Detroit, Michigan, serves as hospital

libraries editor; Elizabeth Connor, University of Connecticut, Farmington, serves as international editor; and Carolyn E. Lipscomb, Durham, North Carolina, serves as association history editor. The proceedings (Steven J. Squires, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), book reviews (Janet M. Coggan, University of Florida, Gainesville), software reviews (Janis F. Brown, University of Southern California, Los Angeles), and building projects (Virginia M. Bowden, University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio) editors are the continuing associate editor positions. Thanks are due to "retired" proceedings editor Gary D. Byrd, Ph.D., building projects editor Logan Ludwig, Ph.D., and book reviews editor Connie Poole, who served the *Bulletin* superbly for many years.

Becoming a preeminent electronic presence

A Web presence for the *Bulletin* was established in May 1996 with the posting of the "Instructions to Contributors" information from the January issue together with other pertinent information. Beginning with the July 1996 issue (volume 84:3) the table of contents and abstracts from the prepress area at Allen Press (the *Bulletin* printer) will be converted into HyperText Markup Language (HTML) placed on the Allen Web server, and linked to MLANET. Information on the Allen server should appear before each issue is mailed to MLA members and *Bulletin* subscribers. These are the first steps in the electronic evolution of the *Bulletin*. The business model that the *Bulletin* is following with these initial steps preserves the printed *Bulletin* as the archival standard, but provides distribution of the table of contents and abstracts via the Web. The mi-

gration of the prepress data should ensure complete compatibility with the archival printed issue. This particular business model is the common one currently used by many STM publishers.

As we take these first steps at creating a Web presence, other business models need to be examined for fit with MLA member needs. Another model of electronic distribution via the Web is the one used by the *Journal of Biological Chemistry (JBC)**, which is produced in collaboration with Stanford University's Highwire Press. Full text and images from the *JBC* are published on the Web as a parallel effort to the paper publication. Whether this is desirable to MLA members and economically feasible are issues to be examined with

* Further information about the *Journal of Biological Chemistry* on the Web can be found by visiting <http://highwire.stanford.edu/jbc/home/>.

greater scrutiny during 1997. Whether to publish full-text articles and images on the Web is an issue driven by economics more than by editorial content or peer review, although hypertext linking and other Web features afford a greater degree of flexibility and creativity for authors.

An experiment in progress by the *Medical Journal of Australia (MJA)* in collaboration with the University of Sydney Library uses electronic publishing on the Web to examine a new model of peer review.† This business model assumes that the print publication will be the archival "gold standard," but offers faster publication of research through Web prepublication of research articles accepted

† A description of the online peer review trial of the *Medical Journal of Australia* and the University of Sydney Library can be found by visiting <http://www.library.usyd.edu.au/mja/>.

for publication in the printed *MJA*. Trial objectives include open scrutiny of articles and the peer-review process itself, by electronically posting articles with reviewers' comments. This business model is driven not only by the economics of mounting full-text and images on the Web, but by a perceived need to dramatically change the entire infrastructure needed to conduct a peer-review process.

The year ahead will be an opportunity to explore various options, obtain input from MLA members, and create a strategy for the *Bulletin* to have not just a presence on the Web, but a preeminent electronic presence.

*J. Michael Homan, Editor
Mayo Clinic
Rochester, Minnesota*

Reference

1. MEYERS B. What do you feed precocious dinosaurs so they'll stay healthy? *Libr Acquis* 1996 20(3):351-3.