

Hybrid OA Journals: A Progression or a Destination?

By Dana Weber
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The proliferation of open access journals has provided authors of scholarly works a choice in how their works are published and archived. In doing so, open access journals have become competition for the mainstream so-called “toll access” journals. Some of these traditional journals have realized the potential of offering authors and institutions these open options and thus formed hybrid open access journals. This article will examine in detail exactly what a hybrid “Open Access” journal is and whether or not it qualifies as truly offering an “open” option for authors. It will also determine the reasons that toll access journals have gone hybrid and it will take a look at how successful they are. Lastly the article will explore the effect that hybrid journals have on the open movement to determine whether they support it or undermine it.

What is a hybrid open access journal?

A hybrid “Open Access” journal is journal that publishes scholarly articles under two economic models. The first economic model that it employs is the traditional “toll” model that accepts journal submissions and publishes those that are accepted while selling a subscription based service that for a price, gives access to readers. The second economic model that it employs is one where the author pays a fee to the journal to make the article open to readers, regardless of whether or not they subscribe to the journal. This second model gives open access to readers without requiring a fee from them. It is an economic model that is used by some fully Open Access publishers, like the Public Library of Science, although all Open Access journals that use this model offer an economic hardship waiver (Open Access Directory, 2009).

Most hybrid OA journals were once traditional toll journals that have adopted the second model, giving a choice to the authors. A hybrid OA journal uses both models to sustain itself, as well as adhere to mandates issued by research foundations and institutions. In addition, hybrid OA journals offer a choice to the author regarding open access and, in some cases, to the copyright and licensing after publishing. This choice is given to authors only after their submission has been accepted for publication (Elsevier, 2009). Many hybrid OA journals that once criticized Open Access journals for using what is termed an “author-pay” model, make this distinction very clear. “In this model, the publisher doesn’t impose anything on the author, but, after the article is accepted for publication following a process of peer review, the author is given the option to publish his or her article with open access.” (Velterop, 2007).

What one journal calls “hybrid open access”, another journal calls “sponsored article” however. There are many names that these traditional journals chose when they adapted some open access options into their business practices. Ranging from “Author Choice” from the American Chemical Society, to “Free to Read” from the American Physical Society, and “Oxford Open” from Oxford University Press these different names also illustrate differences in the hybrid model (Wikipedia, 2009). The full breadth of these publisher copyright and self-archiving policies are available at the SHERPA/RoMEO site where it is possible to look up each publisher to determine their specific guidelines. These guidelines are always changing, too. As the Open Access movement evolves, it has a direct effect on these hybrid models. While the traditional toll journals have been somewhat slow in adapting open access options, outside pressures from authors and institutions have forced them to constantly adapt and change what they mean by hybrid.

So are hybrid OA journals “open”?

To determine this we need a definition for “Open”. This is not easy to do for there exists as many definitions for the term “Open” as there exist opinions about it. The Budapest Open Access Initiative was one of the first groups of like-minded scholars that came together to discuss open access and how to facilitate an open model for scholarly research (2002). They came to the following conclusion:

“By ‘open access’ to this literature, we mean its free availability on the public internet, permitting any users to read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of these articles, crawl them for indexing, pass them as data to software, or use them for any other lawful purpose, without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. The only constraint on reproduction and distribution, and the only role for copyright in this domain, should be to give authors control over the integrity of their work and the right to be properly acknowledged and cited.”

Peter Suber, a leading scholar in the Open Access movement has taken the text of the Budapest Open Access Initiative and summarized it with four criteria. Open access means that the article is digital, online, free of charge, and free of most copyright and licensing restrictions. (Suber, 2007). If we apply these criteria to hybrid OA journals we must apply them individually. As mentioned above, each journal has its own name and guidelines for their program and additionally, these guidelines are continuously changing. Therefore Suber suggests that we ask nine questions concerning these hybrid OA models to determine if they offer authors options that are truly open access (Suber, 2006). These questions point to the four main criteria that he uses to determine open access. The questions include copyright and licensing policy issues, pre-print and post-print rules, general questions about the author’s fees and waivers for economic hardship, and subscription price reductions based on OA options. In answering these questions, Suber points out the deficiency in most of the hybrid OA models for each of these questions. While several hybrid journals have been changing their copyright and licensing policies with Springer leading the way (Velterop, 2007), and pre-print and post-print rules starting with Elsevier (Suber, 2006), only Oxford University Press has issues subscription price

reductions based on OA options (Van Orsdel & Born, 2008). This suggests that Suber's questions are still very valid.

Many libraries and universities also use these questions to gauge Open Access when issuing their own policies regarding publication. Both the University of Berkley (2008) and Columbia University (2009) note differences between authentic Open Access journals and hybrid OA journals on their websites. As of September 14th, 2009, the University of Berkley joined several other prestigious schools (Cornell University, Dartmouth, Harvard University, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology) in announcing a "Compact for Open Access Publication". (Peek, 2009). This compact commits these universities, and any others that join, to "the timely establishment of durable mechanisms for underwriting reasonable publication charges for articles written by its faculty and published in fee-based open-access journals and for which other institutions would not be expected to provide funds." (Compact for Open-Access Publishing Equity, 2009). This compact does not include hybrid OA journals. The reasons for this are based upon Suber's nine questions. While still evolving, hybrid OA journals do not yet fully meet all the criteria for open access. Furthermore in Stuart Shieber's article "Equity for Open-Access Journal Publishing" (2009) published in the open access journal *Public Library of Science Biology*, he articulates the reasons why hybrid OA journals should be excluded. "Hybrid and delayed open-access journals already receive revenue through subscription charges, even for the articles that they make freely available." Therefore they do not need the support, he insists, because they do not provide benefits or discounts to subscribers based upon the amount of OA articles in their journals. Although he acknowledges that not all publishers will agree with him, he concludes that "an institution that covered hybrid fees for all articles emanating from it would, at best, see a tiny compensating reduction in subscription fee." (Shieber, 2009). The impact of this commitment to open access by these universities is too new to be felt. If history is any measure,

however, hybrid OA journals will have to continue to adapt, as they have in the past, to meet the market mandates and competition in the academic publishing world.

Why did traditional “toll” journals go “hybrid” in the first place?

As Stevan Harnad indicates on his blog, *Wrong Advice On Open Access: History Repeating Itself*, “in the year 2000, 34,000 biological researchers worldwide signed a boycott threat to stop publishing in and refereeing for their journals if those journals did not provide (what we would now call) Open Access (OA) to their articles.” (2009). But it wasn’t until the Budapest Open Access Initiative, in 2002, created a plan for inducing change that the traditional journals began paying attention. The Budapest Open Access Initiative determined that creating two alternatives to the traditional publishing model would help bring open access to scholarly research. They advocated two types of Open Access models, one was self-archiving in open repositories, called “green” OA and the second was forming open-access journals, known as “gold” OA (Budapest Open Access Initiative, 2002). It would be almost two years later that the Public Library of Science, made up from the same biological researchers that signed the boycott threat in 2000, would launch their well-respected PLoS open-access journals. Given the prestige and the unity of these authors, and the attention that they were garnering from governments and universities around the world, traditional journals had no choice but to pay attention.

Elsevier was the first publishing giant to formally counter the open access movement. In an article in response to questions posed by the UK House of Commons’ Select Committee on Science and Technology, Elsevier raised many concerns about the idea of open access. They insisted that their costs were lower, and that users gained easier access to their articles (Elsevier, 2004). They maintained that the author-pay model would induce journals to accept sub-par articles in order to achieve sustainability. They also contended that publishers “must continue to make articles available

in multiple media formats” (pg. 2). This last claim is the only one that still stands. The open access model has proven itself to cost less than “publishing a subscription-based e-journal” (Van Orsdel & Born, 2008) and in accepting the author-pay model for itself, hybrid journals have taken the sting out of perceived “vanity press worries” as Shieber argues in his online pamphlet, *Is open-access journal publishing a vanity publishing industry?* While it may be necessary to consider the need for publishing in multiple media formats, Elsevier, along with other major publishers, soon saw the need to adapt to the changes in the marketplace. Even Elsevier admitted this in its official response. “The recent period of rapid, intense innovation in STM publishing— the context in which Open Access has emerged— is far from over.” (Elsevier, 2004).

In addition to the pressure from authors, universities, and governments, traditional publishers had to attend to the rising cry from libraries regarding what they termed as the “serials crisis”. The serials crisis refers to the astronomical price increases for subscriptions to traditional journals in the past 20 years. The Association of Research Libraries estimates that expenditures for serials by research libraries increased 210% between 1986-2001 (Association of Research Libraries, 2004). In their paper, *Framing the issue: Open access*, they issued a call of action in embracing the open access movement in response to the monopolies held by the publishing giants. They add the voices of academic libraries to the push to make open access to scholarly articles. In embracing hybrid OA models, several publishers have insisted that libraries will not pay twice for the open articles that are included in their journals, as mentioned, only Oxford University Press has decreased their subscriptions because of the addition of open articles.

In response to the open access movement, traditional journals began losing their “toll” models in 2004. Elsevier began by permitting post-print archiving in some of their journals. (Suber, 2006). Springer created an “open choice” option for its entire collection of journals a month later including an

open access license. (Velterop, 2007). Blackwell's Online Open and Oxford University Press' Oxford Open began in 2005, followed by Elsevier's Sponsored Article journals in 2006. After that most of the other major publishers followed their lead and offered open choice options with varying degrees of pre- and post-print liberties and licensing choices for a fee. These fees were paid by either the authors or by the funding agencies. The real changes came, however, when funding agencies began to mandate open access publishing. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) signed a law in 2007 requiring that grantees make their work available in an open access format within a year of publishing. Days later "the European Research Council announced the first European Union (EU)-wide mandate on January 10, calling for grant recipients to put research articles and supporting data on the web within six months of publication." (Van Orsdel & Born, 2008). Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Sciences continued the trend and was the first university anywhere to mandate self-archiving in an institutional open repository. In order to compete with OA journals and to comply with major funding sources, hybrid OA journals had no choice but to continue changing their policies to align with the market and mandates issued by the market players.

So how are hybrid OA journal successful?

"The momentum for hybrid journals is understandable. The option is nearly risk-free for publishers. If the uptake is low, they still have subscription revenue to pay the bills. If the uptake is high and subscribers start to cancel, they have fee revenue to pay the bills." (Suber, 2006) Hybrid OA journals give traditional journals a model to comply with funding mandates and to compete with existing OA journals while allowing them two economic models for sustainability. Furthermore, they retain the prestige and influence that they have built over the years as traditional journals. They also preserve all of their existing structures in place for quality peer review and market dissemination. This includes all of the non-research article content that they include in their publications. Adding to their value, this

content consists of book reviews, commentaries, and editorials in addition to any advertising they may incorporate into the journal. (Crawford, 2009).

In addition to the advantages afforded them by their traditional model they combine the proven advantages of OA articles such as increased citation, dissemination, and positive public relations. “OA articles enjoy at least double the rate of citation when compared to closed access, but also potentially as much as two and three times the rate of citation.” (Joint, 2009, pg. 497) The rate of citation is another way that scholars can prove their worth to funding agencies and so journals are very interested in this benefit. Most of all, hybrid OA journals enjoy having some moral ground to stand upon. “Open access is a choice,” Jan Veltero, director of Springer’s Open Access program states in the same named paper, *Open access is a choice* (2007). Many of these journals feel that offering authors a choice about who pays is fairer than a set author-pay model. It should be noted, however, that OA journals employ different models for sustainability, and the author-pay model, which often includes an OA economic hardship fee waiver, is just one of many.

Then what are the drawbacks?

The serials crisis continues virtually unabated. The prices for journal subscriptions, even for hybrid OA journals that have author-financed articles, in most cases are still rising. EBSCO’s Serials Price Projection report for 2009 indicates increases from anywhere between two and twenty-five percent depending upon the currency of the journal. (EBSCO, 2008). In response to this, several prestigious universities have announced a “Compact for Open Access Publication”, specifically excluding hybrid OA journals, as mentioned above. Hybrid OA journals have not been transparent regarding their pricing structures and it is very difficult to determine the impact that OA articles have had on the pricing of hybrid OA journals (Estelle, 2009). While some publishers insist that subscribers are not paying twice for articles, once as the author and again as the subscriber, it is hard to prove exactly what

universities *are* paying for. With the economic downturn impacting universities and funding agencies alike, scholars and their institutions are looking for new ways to increase their citations and decrease their expenditures.

It is costly for authors to choose an author-pay model, which may be a deterrent, especially if their funding agencies will not pay. It can also be confusing to find a path through the constantly changing arrangement of hybrid OA options and models. Some of these options have arrangements with funding agencies already in place and others do not. Rosie Redfield, a molecular biologist, chronicled her journey through the maze of Elsevier's author sponsored program on her blog. "The Elsevier sponsored-access system is confusing, the policy is not clearly explained, and the necessary information is hard to find."(Redfield, 2008). Ultimately there is less freedom offered than what an author would find with an OA journal and many more restrictions. Each journal needs to be evaluated for its policies regarding pre and post-print policies, copyright and licensing agreements, fees and benefits. The remuneration is not as complete for authors who want complete open dissemination for their research, and while hybrid OA journals are changing their policies all of the time, it may not be fast enough for researchers.

How do hybrid OA journals impact the open access movement?

"Hybrid journals are good for OA roughly in proportion to author uptake. To that extent they enlarge the body of OA literature." (Suber, 2007). These journals have offered options that have increased the available knowledge in the world. They have also increased the awareness of open access to scholars and researchers simply by offering these options in their traditional journals. Their acceptance of open access choices has moved the discussion away from the right to have the choice, to what kind of choice should authors have? By offering the author-pay model they have also quieted the criticism over this model used by OA journals.

While hybrid OA journals certainly have impacted the open movement, it is critical to note that the open movement has also had an enormous impact on hybrid OA journals. It is critical because it demonstrates a movement away from the monopolies that these publishers help over publishing policies. While the Oxford University Press has responded to the market by decreasing its subscription rates because of their author-paid articles, other publishers have publically committed themselves “to continue to evaluate its journal subscription prices on a yearly basis, based on a number of factors, including the amount of subscription-model content being published.” (Peek, 2009). Elsevier has released a commitment to decouple its digital pricing structure from its print price in the August issue of *LibraryConnect*. “Factors (will) include the quality and online usage of each journal, plus the number of articles per journal, as well as whether a journal is participating in our author-pays model called Sponsored Articles.” (Silver, 2009). Although we cannot be certain what real effect this will have on open access of subscription costs, the fact remains that they are responding to the open access market push rather than dictating the terms. Hybrid OA journals will need to continue to adapt to the ongoing mandates and market forces in order to remain competitive.

Is there a conclusion?

From the beginning, the Budapest Open Access Initiative provided scholars with two models for changing the market in terms of open access publishing. These models have been successful in influencing the market place and all of the players including authors, universities, funding agencies, and publishers. This market effect has forced tradition journals into innovation and adaption of open access options that continue to evolve today. Although many saw the early efforts of hybrid OA journals as not good enough to be considered “open access”, and those beliefs continue today, it is clear that hybrid OA journals have not reached a single destination but are in the process of adjustment and transformation. This evolution has and will continue to be determined by many of the OA market forces in place. While there is room for commercial publishing in the market place, it is no longer the

dominant force in determining policy. How this will effect the price, we will have to wait and see. It is obvious, though, that change will continue.

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