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The Article of the Future

ASHLEY VASAS

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“Science publishing is one of the few areas where every year it takes less and less time to find information, while in other professions it takes more and more time just to find information. The less time scientists and professional spend finding information, the more time they have to combine it, to do the creative part”



On a sunny afternoon in late May, RE_ Magazine Editor in Chief Sjors de Heuvel and Lead Content Editor Ashley Vasas sat down to discuss the new developments in academic publishing coming from Elsevier, whose office is located outside of Amsterdam. Elsevier is a leading publisher of academic and scientific journals and has created what they have branded the Article of the Future.

This new electronic format differs from the previously available PDF in many ways. When viewing the Article of the Future, the screen is split into three sections; the left pane provides an outline that doubles as navigational links, the middle pane contains the peer reviewed journal article itself, and the right pane includes valuable extras such as article and author information, as well as figures, references and other features that further illustrate and add value to the content of the article.

The Article of the Future is currently viewable from the Elsevier website (<http://www.articleofthefuture.com/>). To discuss this and other innovations the company is driving in the industry, they met with Philippe Terheggen, Senior

Vice President of Journal Publishing, and IJsbrand Aalsbersberg, Vice President of Content Innovation.

RE_Magazine: Please explain to our readers how you were inspired to create the Article of the Future.

Aalsbersberg: Given the fact that the article was all paper based, and in the last centuries all research was done on paper, everything was print based, but more and more research and communication is being done now electronically, and so the new article should be much more electronic. That does not mean PDF, but really complete new articles with new interactive tools, an article much closer to what the researcher does now. The article really follows, or should follow, the workflow of the researcher. The communication tools in the article should be closer to the workflow tools of the scientist.

RE_Magazine: How much of the content of the Article of the Future comes from the author? To what extent is the author involved in the final product?

Aalsbersberg: Because a lot of the input

needs to come from the author, and one of the responsibilities for the publisher is to make sure that we take the input from the author and put it in the new form of the article, but then in such a way that it's as easy for the author as possible. In that sense we really want to focus on the author, that we make it easy for him to publish, to communicate, to broadcast his results and his research.

Terheggen: If you look at the Article of the Future, the end product of the article is the middle pane. What's on the right hand side are a lot of helpers that may sometimes be provided by the author, but also sometimes, over time, we may add new things to the article, but these are then provided by us of course.

What is in the middle pane is indeed sacred. That is what the author has provided and what the reviewer has peer reviewed. We really try to differentiate that the middle pane is really what the author has provided, and the right hand pane might be additional information, that comes sometimes from the author, but also very often comes from us.



RE_Magazine: As some of the content in the Article of the Future is created, have concerns been expressed by authors over that additional content?

Aalsbersberg: I just came from an editor's conference in San Francisco, and this very question came up. Because if it is that the right pane is, or can be, generated outside the consent of the author, then what is the responsibility of the editor or the reviewers for that? There is a realization by the editors that this is an integrated part of the articles, and at the same time, for the benefit of the reader and for the first time in history, they do not have full say over the extended article will look like, because this is very much determined by the user. That's why we definitely want to make that separation between what happens in

the middle pane with the type of content on the left side, and what happens on the left side. This is very important for our authors, who can claim ownership over the content in the middle pane, but also for our readers. They have to know what is peer reviewed, what is checked by the community, and what is added on.

RE_Magazine: How do you see innovations like those in the Article of the Future benefiting your readers?

Terheggen: This is exactly why we are in innovation; it is about providing benefits to readers. By combining the article with modeling information, linking to third party data or content, all within the article, provided in the workbench, where all the information and tools are together, you again save readers time. And I think

that's a very important thing. Science publishing is one of the few areas where every year it takes less and less time to find information, while in other professions it takes more and more time just to find information. The less time scientists and professional spend finding information, the more time they have to combine it, to do the creative part. So cutting that time while the information is increasing is actually a big contribution. And the article of the future is really part of that.

The Article of the Future is definitely a step toward the future of how we view information, and Elsevier has more innovations underway as well. They are also implementing advances in other areas of journal publishing, such as Article Page Publishing, in which they provide pagination for articles approximately seven weeks earlier than in the previous pre-publication process. Since page numbers are required for citation, this allows the articles to be cited earlier by researchers and therefore speeds the publication of new works. They have also turned the peer review system on its head, by publishing the peer review reports in the journals themselves and by allowing the authors of the peer review reports to be printed by consent. This steps away from the traditional, anonymous peer review system and allows the authors of the peer review reports to be credited for their reviewing work.

These innovations are shaping the way that information is displayed in the academic world and increasing the speed at which it can be shared and used to inspire new ideas and discoveries. By harnessing this innovation, Elsevier is truly leading academic publishing into the future.

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