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Responding to the Blogosphere

In the July issue of *Communications*, Moshe Vardi addressed ACM's access model in his Editor's Letter entitled "Open, Closed, or Clopen Access?" (p. 5). The letter has since

been picked up in the blogosphere by John Dupuis, the esteemed Science & Engineering Librarian from York University in Toronto, on his blog *Confessions of a Science Librarian* (<http://scienceblogs.com/confessions>). Dupuis raised some interesting questions that I believe deserve response, especially since as a scholarly publisher of nearly two decades the topics of open access (OA) and association publishing are particularly near and dear to my heart.

It is worth repeating a sentiment that Dupuis offered in his blog that ACM is "on the side of the angels," not just because I really like the sound of this, but because the sentiment underscores an important truth related to both OA and association publishing, the truth that association publishers are in effect all OA publishers. In the hotly debated realm of OA, sides have been drawn and too often the issues and players are portrayed as black and white, right or wrong, good and evil. These dichotomies are easy to package and sell to those who are buying, but all too often they are inaccurate.

So is the case with the now famous color-coded guide to OA publishers. This system places publishers in boxes, but fails to address the reality that association publishers (regardless of their color-coded status) serve as field-wide gatekeepers of information and knowledge without a profit motive to drive their decision making. Associations like ACM are their membership, and as a result, are simply an extension of the intentions and will of the scientific communities they serve.

Much like the notion of an institutional repository at a more targeted level, associations provide a single point of entry for members to access the historical and ongoing record of scholarship for their entire field (if executed well, that is).

The fact that ACM charges both for access to the published information in its Digital Library and also extends the courtesy of "Green OA" to its authors is actually less important to me (while both are important aspects of what we do) than the fact that ACM and many other association publish-

ers serve as well-intentioned caretakers of the scholarly record. I have spent too many hours trying to identify the "most up-to-date version" of an author's article on his or her Web site or digging through the various related institutional repositories to identify a specific version of an article to believe that any other system at the present time offers the advantages of publishing with learned societies.

When I say that all association publishers are essentially OA publishers, I mean this from the perspective that associations and their corresponding communities are one and the same. In my opinion, the question should not be how will society publishers justify their existence in the future, but rather how can they be better at marketing themselves and promoting the valuable work that they continue to do. Publishing will always have a cost, whether it relates to print publications or publishing information online. In most well-researched articles I've read on OA, all parties generally tend to agree on this. The real question is where is this money best spent and how. As a longtime publisher who has worked for both for-profit and a leading association publisher, I feel strongly that this is where any debate should be focused, and I am confident that the most valuable and well-run professional society publishers will in the long run continue to prove their worth to the scientific community at large.

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