

Hindawi Publishing: Catering to Open Access

by SHELLI SHAW

In the mid-1990s, graduate students Ahmed Hindawi and Nagwa Abdel-Mottaleb began noticing how popular electronic scholarly communication was becoming, particularly in their physics community. They were intrigued by the Internet's impact on society—this coupled with the impact of electronic systems on academic publishing opened the door to a new business opportunity. Although the duo had no professional experience other than publishing their own research, they decided to launch a publishing venture in their home base of Egypt.

BEHIND THE SCENES

In 1997, when Hindawi and Abdel-Mottaleb started Hindawi Publishing Corp., the Cairo-based commercial publisher focused on scientific, technical, and medical (STM) journals and technical books. By then, Hindawi had earned his Ph.D. in physics, and Abdel-Mottaleb had nearly completed her Ph.D. in differential geometry. Although they both started out as faculty members at Ain Shams University, they now manage the company on a full-time basis. Hindawi, as company president, oversees the day-to-day operations and is involved in all strategic and developmental decisions; as vice president, Abdel-Mottaleb focuses on internal developments and restructuring, while continuing to build the enterprise.

Hindawi Publishing's first journal was *The International Journal of Mathematics and Mathematical Sciences*, which the company began publishing in 1999. (Although the print journal itself was originally launched by another



Hindawi Publishing Corp., based in Cairo, expects to have between 50 and 60 open access journals by the end of 2006.

publishing firm in 1978, it is now available in print and online versions.) The firm, which continued to add titles through acquisitions and startups, now publishes 48 journals as well as two book series.

The OA Model

What sets this publishing company apart from others is its support of an open access (OA) model. OA, a relatively new model for academic publishing, provides free online digital content that is usually written by scientists and scholars for peer-reviewed journals and articles in the STM niche. These articles are

frequently written and submitted without any expectation of payment on the authors' part. This is not nearly as altruistic as it might appear since scholars/scientists are used to sharing their work. After all, universities and organizations provide the funding for their research, and a published article is simply the result of their work. What's more, it's a boon for research in general and a boost for researchers' careers to have one of their published articles cited, used, or added to in any way.

The concept of OA began in the late 1990s, when university libraries found that the costs of STM journal subscription rates were rising faster than their budgets. As a result, many libraries

began canceling subscriptions. “Smaller publishers need to find sustainable business models that do not rely on revenue from libraries, since library budgets are increasingly dominated by ‘Big Deal’ packages from the largest publishers,” according to Paul Peters, Hindawi’s senior publishing developer. Publishing models that would be free to readers seemed to be the answer, and the OA movement began.

By its very definition, OA includes an author’s agreement to distribute published work for free, as well as to create the technical structure responsible for distribution on the Internet. OA can sometimes be confused with open content, which allows any given published work to be modified. In OA, the public can access the work, but no modifications can be made. On the other hand, peer review of published articles (a tradition in the STM world) is encouraged.

Using the Author-Pays Model

Hindawi uses what is known as the author-pays model. While it may sound as if the authors supply the funds, the costs are actually covered by the author’s institution or research funds (while the authors retain their articles’ copyrights). Hindawi credits its success with this business model (the most popular method of achieving OA), but debate abounds in the field whether this is the best choice. Not-for-profit STM publishers are concerned that journals using this model are actually limiting themselves to a set number of revenue sources and that authors may also be able to pay select journals to publish articles not normally accepted under other circumstances.

An organization called Washington DC Principles for Free Access to Science (<http://www.dcprinciples.org>) offers a “middle ground” between traditional publishing and OA. To maintain the high standards of traditional STM publishing while providing unrestricted access, the group advocates that not-for-profit publishers work with scholarly communities (such as libraries) to “ensure that these communities are sus-

tained, science is advanced, research meets the highest standards and patient care is enhanced with accurate and timely information.”

Why OA Succeeds

Peters, who is responsible for planning and developing the company’s OA collection, doesn’t see this as a problem. “When a new open access journal is launched, its contents are immediately available to the entire world,” he said. “In contrast, subscription journals take years to build up a base of subscribers. This is one of the main reasons why open access journals have been so successful in such a short period of time.”

The company’s success can be at least partially attributed to its acquisitions. It acquired many journals that were already well-known in their fields, so academic submissions to these titles were easier to attract than for brand-new journals. The company began its foray into OA in late 2003, with one OA article. By 2004, 55 OA articles were published; by last year, the number had grown to more than 241. In 2006, Hindawi expects to publish between 1,000 and 1,500 OA articles.

Toll Access for Journals

Prior to 2004, Hindawi offered subscription (also called “toll”) access to its journals, but that year, the company began converting the journals to full OA. Adding OA articles to existing journals increased the odds of success for its OA model, leading Hindawi to pursue an aggressive development strategy for its OA collection in 2005. The strategy included new launches as well as acquisitions from other publishers. By the end of 2005, the company’s OA journal collection featured 15 titles.

In 2006, Hindawi’s OA titles continue to grow. In August, the company added five new titles to its journal collection, bringing the total to 48 (42 are OA and six are toll access). Hindawi expects to have between 50 and 60 OA journals by the end of 2006 and as many as 150 by

the end of 2007 through acquisitions and new launches.

The company has been growing at a rate from 45 percent to 50 percent annually, according to company figures. “[W]e plan to hold that 50 [percent] annual growth rate in the next few years,” according to Hindawi, who refers to its growth target as “10 by 10” (meaning 10,000 articles annually by the year 2010).

At Home in Egypt

With 220 employees, the company conducts all of its publishing activities—including typesetting, copy editing, reference checking, and XML markup—at its Cairo headquarters, the company’s only location. Each of Hindawi’s journals are led by an external editor in chief, assisted by a board of editors.

With a team of about 15 IT developers, the company has developed its own electronic manuscript tracking system, a Web application that allows authors to submit manuscripts and editors to accept or reject them as well as request modifications or send them to referees. The application, which also lets authors upload their source materials or download galley proofs, organizes the entire peer-review process, from the point of submission until the final editorial decision has been made.

Although Hindawi receives little local revenue and little publishing competition in Egypt, the company’s market extends worldwide. The company is definitely making an impact and will continue to do so.

Here’s how Hindawi sums up his company’s success so far: “It has been challenging, but [it’s] a whole lot of fun to build everything from scratch.”

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