Electronic journal access in an academic library revisited

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Manuscript received July 2002

In the interests of immediacy, the authors waived their right to have this article refereed.

Introduction

Electronic journal registering and access provision is an area where practitioners need never be bored by monotony. When one problem is resolved another appears to take its place. The resolution frequently proves only temporary however hopeful one may be at the time. The apparently resolved problem goes to the back of the queue and re-appears in due course, it seems.

Access issues

Although the following e-mail message is lengthy, the authors believe it is worth reading in its entirety, as it encapsulates so much of what is wrong with the present situation.

> 'I've just received a confirmation of online access to a journal after two weeks of intensive e-mail correspondence with the publisher, the subscription agent and the content provider, and cannot help thinking there must be an easier way. I received a notification from the content provider of online availability of a journal title we subscribe to in print. I completed an online activation form requesting access and supplied the agent's reference number as requested. I received an e-mail from the publisher (in the US) that they could not locate our subscription. This was not entirely unexpected since we use the agent's consolidation service and the publisher may not have the library's address as the delivery address. We contacted the agent to ask for the subscription reference number the publisher requested.

> The agent e-mailed back a reference number. We forwarded the number to the publisher. The publisher replied that this was not the number they needed. We wrote back to the agent. All this was interspersed with what seemed like daily automated e-mail messages from the publisher informing us that they failed to locate our subscription record. Eventually an e-mail from the publisher suggested that we should look at the label on a recent issue. I had already done so but all I could find was a label printed and attached by the agent. There was no sign of a number in the format that the publisher required. However, I did have another look and found that under the agent's label there was a smaller label which had obviously been affixed by the publisher. By removing the agent's label carefully I was able to find the magic number that the publisher needed. I sent the number to the publisher. They replied that the number actually referred to the agent and could not identify us as the subscriber, but that the second number I also supplied helped to trace our subscription although it was not a valid number as it was for a subscription which had expired. (The journal issue I found the label on was the January–February 2002 issue.) They also explained that the reason why they could not trace our subscription was because our order had been placed through an agent. (I thought we'd already told them this!) Incidentally we have an agreement with the agent to arrange online access automatically if it is available as part of the print subscription and have given them our preferred access routes. Was it worth the effort? I hope so — when our users can access the contents of this journal online — apparently no issues are available online yet! But there must be a less time-consuming way to arrange online access to electronic journals...' (Yamaguci 2002a)

This e-mail produced a number of heartfelt agreements, such as those by Cole (2002a), Morris (2002), Wilson (2002), and Stubbs (2002a).

Renewal problems

The expectation of the authors was that, as publishers and libraries gained experience dealing with electronic journals, the access problems of previous years would disappear, but the problems seem to accumulate rather than dissipate. The following are just a few of a plethora of related e-mails on discussion lists.

> 'We often have difficulties with renewals for electronic journals. My count this past year was that 14 per cent of our e-journals were incorrectly renewed or summarily cancelled. Sometimes it is our subscription agent, sometimes it's our accounting department, but most of the time it's the publisher or electronic journal vendor. All of these problems could have been corrected or dealt with prior to de-activating our subscription if we had only known.' (Macdonald 2002)

> 'I know it's the same old story, but why do I need to tell it every year. Isn't it time we made progress on this issue. This year I converted several of my print/online subscriptions to online only subscriptions, but I have yet to receive any official confirmation from the publishers that these renewals went through OK. True, I can see if I've paid the subscription, but we all know that it is not always enough to know that you've paid. All of these renewals were formerly print/online combinations. With a print subscription one would notice that a print journal was not being received and would chase it, but an online only subscription is very different and I believe a different approach by the publisher is needed. In one case where I moved to electronic only, we were given a new subscriber number for that title on the publishers database, but the publisher concerned thought we had cancelled our subscription to this title altogether! This particular publisher felt that they needed to improve the communication between themselves and the agents, which I support.' (Crawshaw 2002a)

These postings produced a number of 'me too' responses, which can be viewed at the archives of Serialst-L at http://list.uvm.edu/archives/serialst.html and LIS-Ejournals at http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/LIS-E-JOURNALS.html

The Association of Subscription Agents is a concerned party and has issued a code of practice relating to the gracing of electronic journals. This is available from http://www.subscription-agents.org. (Turner 2001)

Catchword/ingenta

Many libraries are experiencing severe problems with access to titles loaded on ingenta/Catchword.

> 'We've had problems with subscription renewals to MIT Press journals (via CatchWord). It took at least a dozen e-mail messages between us, SwetBlackwell, CatchWord/ingenta and MIT Press and a couple of weeks to gain access to 2002 issues of one title. I have now checked other MIT Press titles and access to the 2002 issues don't seem to have been activated for any of them although we have renewed our subscriptions. This kind of problem is becoming more and more unacceptable and time consuming. It makes one question just what it is we are paying for when we take out subscriptions. What about our users who suddenly don't have access to things that we informed them we do have access to? There must be a way that publishers can annually verify to us those journals we have electronic access to.' (Yamaguchi 2002b)

One response in particular resonated with the authors.

> '... our users perceive this as a library problem. We are the incompetents here, especially for the really favourite online journals. (And those you do hear about right away).' (Davis 2002)

Responses were also received from Mulliner (2002), Waldrop (2002a and 2002b) and Watkinson (2002), among others. More pertinently, the discussion also provoked apologies from a representative of ingenta, with promises of rapid assistance at the first sign of further problems. (Meinert 2002)

Publisher problems

Lippincott, Williams and Wilkins

> 'Has anyone else been irritated lately by loss of access to Lippincott's online titles? Our particular long-running problem (six weeks so far of lost access) is *Journal of Clinical Oncology*. After a lot of to-ing and fro-ing trying to find out why a paid subscription to this title was 'on hold', I was forwarded a message from our subscription agent which went to the NEYAL reps list. For those of you who haven't seen it, it might be of use to repeat it here:
>
>> Dear NEYAL members,
>>
>> It has been brought to our attention by our Publisher Relations department that the above are making changes to their records, a process which we have been warned could temporarily affect the delivery of both print and electronic titles.
>>
>> LWW are assigning new reference numbers to many of our subscriptions for two reasons:
>>
>> 1. They did not process our renewals/new orders correctly for 2002.
>>
>> 2. They are updating all of their records so every customer will have one reference number for ALL their subscriptions. This number will then be used for electronic access.
>>
>> They have advised us that unfortunately this means that online access may be denied while the numbers are being changed. LWW will be providing us with a complete listing of the new references in due course, once their work is complete.
>>
>> [snipped out stuff about print]

> > Please be assured that LWW and Highwire (their access provider), and LWW and our Publisher Relations team are working closely together to try and minimise the disruption to all concerned.
>
> So unless I've misunderstood, LWW are quite happy to take our money (which proves we still subscribe) but not to give us access either to current or archive material, nor are they able to give us any indication of when the titles concerned will be back online. There is no explanation on the site, just a message 'Your subscription is on hold'. We have heard nothing from LWW even though we have named administrators of online subs. Am I naive in thinking a blanket e-mail even to a list such as this wouldn't have been too much trouble (can't see any in the lis-e-journals archives)?' (Cole 2002b)

Agreements with this were received by Stubbs (2002b) and Allen (2002a and 2002b) among others. Yet again, the wording on the screen that the subscription is on hold leads users to assume that the library has inefficiently allowed its subscription to lapse.

Mosby

> 'Letter received from Mosby. What's the point of ejournals if you can use them only in a library! That's assuming your public machines accept cookies. Let's hope the site licence is imminent.
>
> > 1. Institutional Subscribers
> > Utilization of online access through a restricted range of IP address is not permitted at this time. An institutional site license is currently under development. We will notify our customers when the site license is available.
> >
> > 2. Current Policy
> > Authorized users of institutional subscriptions shall be those individuals affiliated with institutions who are accessing Mosby's Online Journals via workstations located within the institutions' library or research facilities (that is, the buildings to which issues of the journal are sent or where issues of the journal are housed). No access to Mosby's Online Journals will be permitted to individuals affiliated with the institution who are located at workstations situated elsewhere on the institutions' campuses (for example,, lodgings, classrooms, offices) or at off-campus sites. To provide access, please select those machines in the library/research

> facility in which you would like to provide online access to Mosby's Journals and log-in once on each of those machines ensuring that the "Save Password" option is checked. This will save a cookie to the machine allowing your users to access to online journals without requiring the user name and password. If your institution is unable to comply with the current terms, online access should not be provided on behalf of the institution until perhaps a suitable site license becomes available.' (Winship 2002a)

This provoked some bitter humour, for example:

> 'I just caught one of our users accessing a Mosby title from the first floor washroom on his laptop via our wireless network. I soon put an end to that, let me tell you...' (Scott 2002a)

> 'It would seem that this language authorizes usage through workstations in the library to affiliated individuals anywhere who are not located at a workstation. If they had meant to exclude ALL users not located in the library, they would not have used the words "who are located at workstations situated...". So if you can configure an authenticating proxy server on a library workstation to connect only to PDA's, laptops, Coke machines, and anything other than a workstation, you're in compliance with the language in this letter. Or alternatively, could it be that the letter was written by someone who doesn't understand much about how e-journals get used?' (Hellman 2002)

The authors have not seen a letter from Mosby as outlined above, and the website claims innocuously enough that 'Subscribers to the print version ... now receive access to the online version as part of their subscription.' No site restrictions appear in their online terms and conditions.

Complicated access restrictions

McElroy offers the following advice to publishers:

> 'Do not make licence agreements overly restrictive. Libraries are growing resistant to signing agreements that defy their mission of providing services and collections to their users. Limiting agreements to a specific number of workstations is impractical in a networked environment with dynamic IP ranges or on a multi-building campus. Providing desktop delivery of electronic resources is a growing priority for libraries. Resistance to these restrictions can affect decisions regardless of the importance of a journal. For example, many medical libraries refused to agree to the *New*

> *England Journal of Medicine*'s new agreement restricting access to a specific number of workstations. The publisher's subsequent offer to continue username/password access without wide distribution of the password was sufficiently vague and restrictive to cause many libraries to drop the journal from their electronic collection.' (McElroy 2002 p127)

The authors have had constant access problems with titles from the American Medical Association, for example, *Archives of medicine*. Others also encounter these problems. The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio had this to say in an e-mail dated 13 February 2002:

> 'Our library now has print + one concurrent user per active subscription for our American Medical Association titles. A big frustration for our users is the fact that, when all user slots are in use, the system does not display a message stating this. Instead, we get a log-in/registration page leading our users to assume that our campus does not have access or that our access has been cut off.' (Lynch, 2002)

It is another example of the library staff being made to look like incompetent idiots in the eyes of the users, as the message on the website implies that the library has not provided access.

Password gripes

Those with a black sense of humour (a prerequisite for successful ejournal management) should enjoy reading about the following access conditions.

SeaWeb

> 'Not strictly an ejournal, but SeaWeb (Lloyd's Register of Ships) set all passwords to expire every month so the first person who logs at the beginning of the month is asked to change the password. We have to make sure that we get there first... and pray that nobody notices the "change password" button at the top of the search screen!' (Watkins 2002)

Family process

> '"Users accessing through your organization will be required to provide the institution code along with their e-mail address. They will be immediately e-mailed a temporary password valid for 24 hours of access to full-text articles. There is no limit to access within a 24 hour period or how many times they follow this procedure for access." No comment...' (Scott 2002b)

Value Line Investment Surveys

> 'One that gets me is *Value Line Investment Surveys*.

> Access is by username and password, but, (here's the great part) you are only allowed to use the un/pw in the library. Now how to do you stop people from using it outside of the library when you give them a username and password? Of course, you can always purchase multi-user site licensing by IP address...' (Taylor 2002)

Subscription numbers

> 'Finding numbers on mailing labels is OK for an individual, but not for any library of even moderate size. Could publishers or agents arrange to send us details of our subscription numbers as part of the renewals confirmation process?' (Clennett 2002)

> 'It would also be very useful if subscription agents supplied us with publisher subscription numbers on annual invoices for example. I am sure that subscription agents would prefer this option rather than having to deal with a never ending stream of e-mail requests from institutions for information on subscription numbers.' (Wilson 2002).

This idea was seconded by Stubbs (2002c) and was supported by Crawshaw (2002b) and Ainsworth (2002).

But using subscription agents to obtain numbers can be problematic.

> 'In my experience, the subscription agents do not always have an accurate number, and are unable to supply a list at the beginning of the new subscription year of titles and subscriber numbers. I have asked numerous times for this, and have not obtained a useful list.' (Thompson 2002)

> 'Our serials vendor does include the subscriber number printed directly on our renewal invoice under each title. It is not 100% but it's useful nonetheless. They also have the subscriber numbers in their online system which we have access to. When not available, I request it from the vendor and usually have success in getting them to respond within 1–2 days if not sooner.' (Harris 2002)

> 'One of our agents provides the subscriber numbers on their invoices, although there are many blank spaces and in some cases these subscriber numbers are no longer valid or contradict ones that we may already have. Also, the numbers are sometimes composite numbers and the subscriber number is contained within these, and it is not always possible to know which part of the number is needed. Our other agent doesn't provide this information on their invoices, although for this agent we now have access to their serials management database and can find the number — if it is there, which it isn't always.' (Crawshaw 2002c)

Subscription agents

As the Secretary General of the Association of Subscription Agents has noted,

> 'Managing the licensing and distribution arrangements involved in the rapidly increasing e-journal market is now recognized as a complex and costly challenge. Publishers have not dropped prices and may even have increased them because of the costs incurred in maintaining their e-journal databases. Libraries are finding staff time and expertise stretched to unexpected limits in satisfying end-user services.' (Turner 2002a)

> 'Has anyone out there stopped to measure the costs of administering e-journals? By this I mean the cost of subscription management and access provision. It seems to me that as the process of acquiring journals changes a great deal of simplicity is being lost with consequent and often quite substantial impacts on cost. As a result the ASA is interested in how we can ease this process.' (Turner 2002b)

> 'Are libraries willing to pay more for the agents to extend their role more comprehensively into this area? Or, given competitive tendering to consortia, if one agent started, could the others afford not to follow?' (Merchant 2002)

> 'I think if agents improve their performance in the processing of e-only orders (or any kind of subscription with an electronic component) and get our access set up quickly and efficiently then we will be happy to use them rather than going direct to publishers which has all the associated problems described in the previous e-mails.' (Crawshaw 2002d)

> 'A new subscription placed with one of the agents, with access arranged by them, usually means that we can access material only from this date. However if we finally manage to get hold of the magic number, aka subscription id, in all cases (except perhaps for Wiley Interscience's dreadful new policy) we can access all content on the site.' (Ainsworth 2002)

> 'We had sent out a message last week asking if anyone was having difficulty establishing access to de Gruyter online journals. We would like to report that since sending out that message, our access problems have been resolved — thanks to the work of Kelly Phelps and the online team at Harrassowitz. Kelly offered her assistance in gaining access to the journals we subscribe to through Harrassowitz. She wasted no time in getting the problem solved. We were pleased to find that almost immediately after giving her a list of our subscribed titles that all of

> our journals were accessible. Harrassowitz has been a great agent to work with in solving this problem. Thanks to everyone who responded, and special thanks to Harrassowitz and their staff for their fine work.' (Mering 2002)

Costs

Van Orsdel claims that the majority of major publishers still offer online 'free' with print (Van Orsdel 2002). The results of a survey published in the *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association*, however, revealed that the increases of print prices for their sample of titles were higher if a type of electronic access were offered. The uneven fluctuations in rates of subscription prices revealed that the pricing of journals with electronic access is still evolving. (Chen 2001)

While most of the time librarians are receiving notice of removal of print bundled with electronic access, sometimes the opposite happens, as the following e-mail from a UK librarian indicates.

> 'I came across this by accident and thought some of you might be interested if you have a print subscription to any of the Endocrine Society's journals — http://www.endojournals.org/ — the last time I checked the site back in November 2001 you still had to pay extra to get the online access. But now, "Subscribers to the print version of The Endocrine Society's Journals have access to Journals Online at no additional charge beginning in 2002". I have to say it wasn't that easy to find this information. It still begs the question as to why there is not a better method of informing libraries about online options for their current subscriptions and verifying that they have been renewed.' (Crawshaw 2002e)

Many scholarly society publishers are finding it difficult to meet the extra costs of providing online access bundled with a print price. Some are struggling to remain both financially viable and fair to their subscribers. The *American Journal of Botany* is a case in point, and its publishers are to be commended for their concern about the effects their pricing policy may have upon access. They announced the proposal months before it took effect, and sought feedback from librarians before announcing the policy. The policy is that the price will be the same for either the print or the electronic version, but that if print subscribers want electronic access there will be a surcharge. (Russell 2002) The 2003 pricing is available at http://www.amjbot.org/subscriptions/cost.shtml.

Response from the library community has been understanding of the struggle but also concerned.

> 'The folks at AJB are to be commended for their efforts to involve librarians in their pricing arrangements, right from the beginning (how unfortunate and typical that

> only now will they get the bulk of the feedback). They are also to be commended for arriving at a very reasonable and sustainable price for institutions, and for caring enough to attempt to be "sure that there are no barriers to being able to afford AJB". If only commercial publishers had that concern.' (Nabe 2002)

> '... adding online access for $50 for the print subscribers will cost you more than that in administering the system. It will also cost libraries and subscription agencies to handle this add-on. I think our actual costs in activating the "complementary" add-on this year and checking that the transition goes smoothly this year and next year will be more than $50. You are complicating your life, and ours, for a trivial sum of money. This has been characteristic of many of the smaller professional societies: they understand their profession. They do not understand electronic publishing.' (Goodman 2002a)

Further comments by librarians can be perused at the Liblicense-L Archives at http://www.library.yale.edu/~llicense/ListArchives/.

Another scholarly society concerned about its own financial position and that of the scholarly community is the American Physical Society. On 29 May 2002 the Society sent an e-mail to subscribers explaining their position in detail. Excerpts are provided below.

> 'Over the past years both the library community and the scholarly societies have wrestled with the painful problem of escalating costs of the scientific literature. This letter is to initiate a dialogue and to provide you with advance notice of the APS pricing for the year 2003... The 2003 Price Chart is available at: http://librarians.aps.org/Price03.pdf. ... Having reviewed the background, philosophy and details of the 2003 APS pricing model, we welcome discussion and comments.' (American Physical Society 2002)

The BMJ Publishing Group has changed its pricing model to allow institutions the option of purchasing print only, online only, and joint print and online subscriptions[1] to its titles. Pricing is based on both tiers of institution and numbers of relevant full-time equivalents. Details of both can be found at http://www.bmjjournals.com/subscriptions/institutional.shtml

In response to some criticisms of this pricing policy, for example by Kagner (2002) David Goodman says

> 'There is only one thing to be pleased about — at least they base their tiers on the size of the medical program, not the overall size of the school. I reserve my real anger for the medical publishers who base their rates on the total enrolment, making no difference between a university like UNC-Charlotte or Princeton without a

> medical school, and a university the same size where half the people are working in medicine. They usually justify their policy on the basis of "simplicity."' (Goodman 2002b)

And another responds eagerly to this with:

> 'That's one of my favorite publisher arguments. "But the pricing plan is so simple! How can you object?" Same thing for licenses. I tell all these publishers the same thing: I'd much prefer a license or pricing schedule that's complicated and reasonable to one that's simple and unreasonable.' (Anderson 2002)

Another title causing concern is *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*. The home page at http://jncicancerspectrum.oupjournals.org/ explains that what they now are calling *Cancer Spectrum* is more than the print version online. It 'integrates the Journal with other sources of cancer information, including abstracts from other journals, cancer statistics, and drug information.' But a consequence is the frightening leap in the price.

> 'Price is now based on an institution's FTE and Oxford University Press insists on using the FTE for the whole university including a liberal arts undergraduate campus and a School of Music, instead of the FTE of the medical campus. This huge price increase seems particularly unfair since Oxford University Press publishes this journal for the National Cancer Institute — an agency of the US government.' (Shipley 2001)

Commercial publishers

It is harder to feel sympathetic to multinational commercial publishers' efforts to charge extra for online access to print subscriptions. For example. Academic Press (now merged with Elsevier) initially bundled online access to the IDEAL reference works such as *Encyclopedia of Immunology* with a purchased print copy but in 2002 changed the policy to include an annual access fee for the electronic version. The website states that, 'Initial access to the innovative online version offering extensive hypertext linking and advanced search tools is available to buyers of the print edition. Ongoing access is maintained for a minimum annual fee.' (http://www.apnet.com/immune/). An e-mail dated 19 June 2002 revealed the information that the minimum annual free is $US75.00 for 2002.

Another Elsevier title is the *Lancet*.

> 'I have just had my renewal subscription for 2002 The Lancet X 2, which the invoice states is for £938.00 (£469.00 each). Due to this showing a very large increase in price from last year, I have rung them up to query it. Apparently this price includes multi-user electronic access as opposed to a one user licence, and this may be

> what you want. However, nothing on the invoice informs you of this. If like us you don't consider that you need this, the price is actually £778 (£389.00 per subscription) which is a considerable difference. To reiterate, nothing on the renewal indicates that you have a choice and if you want the lower pricing you have to ring and request it.' (Riley 2001)

Caveat emptor!

Change of publisher

> 'About a month ago I e-mailed this list details ... of a problem whereby we lost our institutional online access to the *British Journal of Psychiatry*. A couple of other institutions also responded to that e-mail to say that they were also experiencing the same problem. Our access problem to this title was sorted out almost immediately by Rob Edwards, Maney Publishing and I just wanted to thank them for their prompt attention in this matter. Lucy Alexander, sales and marketing manager for the Royal College of Psychiatrists has asked me to forward the following message to this list to explain the steps they had taken to prevent such loss of access when they changed their subscription managers [2].' (Crawshaw 2002f)

> 'And another example (summarised by a colleague): We were notified 19/12/2001 that as of 2002 CUP would be publishing and hosting the following two American Political Science Association publications (PS: *Political Science and Politics; American Political Science Review*) Once they appeared on the CUP site (February I think it was) got the sub number which took ages and tried to activate. The sub number was sent to us via an invoice from CUP. The sub number was rejected by the CUP system — contacted our agent who informed us that our payment had been received and accepted by the previous publisher but that this had not been transferred to CUP. It has taken another month just to get this information from our agent and CUP. Finally received notification that the money had been transferred and that CUP would turn on access immediately (22/05/02) Checked again today still no access to either!!' (Winship 2002b)

> 'Quite by accident during another enquiry (is that not the way it always happens?) I have just found that we have lost our institutional online access to the *Scientific American Archive Online*. Having not received an invoice for this site license for this year I went straightaway to the website where I found that we were no longer being recognised on the basis of our IP address and found that we are being asked to login. Once again we are perfectly willing to pay our bills, but can't pay

> them if we don't get invoiced. Another concern, is when did we lose our access?' (Crawshaw 2002g)
>
> 'I am pleased to inform the list that our problems with access to the *Scientific American Online Archive* have now been resolved and our institutional access reinstated. I also now know that we have not been the only institution affected by this. Apparently the problem was caused during the transfer of responsibility for the licensing from Macmillan Publishers UK to their American company. It's just a pity that no one at Macmillan Publishers UK was able to tell me that this had happened, and take some responsibility to assist me in getting this sorted out, when I spoke to them yesterday. Basically I was left to try and find a contact in the States who I can speak to to get this sorted out. When I finally reached this person and explained the situation, our records were quickly retrieved, the problem pinpointed (but not identified to me) and our access restored. Thanks to Linda Chu, Macmillan Online Publishers, North America, for getting this resolved so swiftly. I still don't know when our loss of access occurred. However, the ease with which a subscription can fall over without the subscriber being notified remains of major concern. We are after all paying real money for these products. Such loss of access also reflects badly on the subscribing institution as we usually take the blame when subscriptions fall over. Linda Chu said that all existing subscribers had been notified of this, but couldn't explain why an e-mail had not come to myself. I guess it's just another glitch in the system! All these problems tend to be quite easy to sort out once you can get to speak to the right person, but why are they arising in the first place? And why are there no additional measures in place to identify potential problems.' (Crawshaw 2002h)
>
> 'It's been another one of those weeks, yesterday we uncovered that our institutional access to the *Scientific American Online Archive* had been terminated at some time (still unknown), today I uncovered the fact that we had lost institutional access to *Science Online*'. (Crawshaw 2002i)

And so it goes on : one day in the life of an ejournal administrator (with apologies to Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn).

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Endnotes

1. The flagship journal, BMJ itself, is still free online.

2. When we decided to change our subscription managers we thought very carefully about how this could be done smoothly with the minimum of disruption for our subscribers. Our prime concern was how such a change would affect online journal access. It was crucial to find a subscription manager who would be able to maintain the existing customer numbers for all our subscribers. It is the customer numbers that are used by the HighWire system to identify online subscribers. Maney and RSM use the same subscription management system. This allowed us, after a number of technical adjustments, to transfer the subscription records to Maney's database and still maintain the existing customer numbers (needed for online access). This meant that our subscribers at the end of 2001 kept the same customer number when they renewed for 2002 and any potential problems or confusion caused by a change could be avoided. At the beginning of 2002 we graced access to the online journals for just over two months to ensure that all subscriber details were correct and renewals (many delayed by a problem with an agent's disk) entered onto the system. The data, including renewers' unchanged customer numbers, was then transferred to HighWire to update their system so that online access would be resumed after the gracing period. Just when we thought we were home and dry there was an unforeseen problem with the data transfer to HighWire! When the new data file was FTP'ed to HighWire it triggered a different processing scheme than the one needed. The problem was not immediately detected, as the system appeared to be working normally. This meant that existing customers trying to access the online journal received the message that their online subscription had expired on 7 March 2002, which was the end of the gracing period. HighWire rectified this problem as soon as they were alerted to it so that normal service could be resumed within a matter of days. The difficulties experienced by the universities of Hertfordshire, Leeds and Liverpool have now been rectified. In each case the issues were different and not directly related to the problem described above. The Royal College of Psychiatrists and, on our behalf, Maney Publishing regard the smooth provision of online access to the *British Journal of Psychiatry* as a top priority. We worked extremely hard to ensure that the changeover was as smooth as possible and can only reiterate our apologies to those who received the expiry message in March.

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Title:
Electronic journal access in an academic library revisited

Date:
2002-08

Citation:
Prabhu, M., Crothers, S., & Sullivan, S. (2002). Electronic journal access in an academic library revisited. Australian Library Journal, 51(3).

Publication Status:
Published

Persistent Link:
http://hdl.handle.net/11343/33734