

ONLINE**MEET THE NEW BOSS; SAME AS THE OLD BOSS? The Who—We Won't Get Fooled Again, 1971**

Six years ago when we took the editorship of PALAIOS in 1996, we anticipated that technological changes not only would allow SEPM to establish a home page for the journal on which we'd make available Tables of Contents, Abstracts, and Figures (done through the efforts of Carla Moore at NOAA early in our tenure), but we (Gastaldo and Savrda, 1996) envisioned that the journal eventually would be available online (accomplished late in our tenure). Soon after taking over the editorial helm, we became aware that there was some concern (should we say panic) in the community about the viability of the journal. At that time we provided data indicating that PALAIOS enjoyed not only a broadened distribution and increased acknowledgment of its scientific significance, but also a financial soundness that ensured the journal's continuity (Gastaldo and Savrda, 1997). Since then, PALAIOS has continued to improve its ranking in the international arena while maintaining a positive financial health (being in the black for the past five years!). In response to these and other parameters within the past few years, submissions have increased by more than 25%, the quality of published manuscripts has remained exceptionally high, and the journal still has little-to-no publication backlog.

Now, thanks to the confidence of the voting membership that we should "get a life"—thank you for not writing our names onto the recent ballot for SEPM Officers—it is time to pass the reigns of power to the new Editor, Chris Maples, who will assume the position at Indiana University beginning with this issue. As the Editorial Office moves to Bloomington, Sara Marcus will serve as Editorial Assistant, replacing Elvira Gastaldo, whom we now need to acknowledge for her dedication to the author's, the review process, and journal production. Her efforts have allowed for the continued success of the journal. It's been a long, but not necessarily strange trip having one's wife as your employee—yes, dear.

One of the changes we (collectively) anticipate within the near future is the accessibility of PALAIOS through multiple venues. SEPM has committed to maintain the journal in paper copy while moving into the digital future. Presently, PALAIOS is part of the BioOne consortium of biological journals (2000 and 2001 issues are available if your institution is a subscriber; back issues will become available). But, soon PALAIOS also will be available through a consortium of geological journals, the details of which still are being hammered out as we write this essay. This January, a group of Geoscience journal editors met in Tulsa to discuss the possibilities of developing such a journal consortium. Officers and Editors from AAPG, AGI, GSA, SEG, SEPM, the Mineralogical Society, and the Geological Society of London spent one day conferencing about the pros and cons of online submission, online reviewing, the effects (to date) of societal membership and journal subscriptions, electronic vendors, copyright issues, and the development of seamless search capabilities of all journals within the consortium. As outlined in Tulsa, there are several goals of the proposal that are being considered by geoscience societies. These include: (1) providing a way in which to furnish the geoscience user-community with a research tool that affords a fully-linked online search capability of the primary literature; (2) increasing the value of societal journals to the greater geoscience community; and (3) meeting the needs of the research librarians who are responsible for budgeting and subscriptions to geoscience journals.

The pros to online submission and review reported by those societies that have adopted these procedures, to date, include a dramatic increase in the receipt of international manuscripts, opening up opportunities to the global scientific community that did not heretofore exist. Truly, online submission promotes internationalization of the geosciences in a way that could not have been predicted only a decade ago. Additionally, it has been noted that the review and turnaround time for online submissions has dropped significantly in these instances. (We should note that PALAIOS continues to maintain an average turnaround time of less than 3 months from receipt of the manuscript to the editorial decision for acceptance/revision/rejection. We doubt that this time can be cut

substantially, even if SEPM adopts online submission and review protocols, because most time in the review process resides with the reviewers.) The cons to online submission and review presently include global reviewer capabilities to access, download, and process the review request, although this may not be an issue in the future as countries and individuals entering the digital age are purchasing computers and connections with state-of-the-art technologies.

As societies—as opposed to for-profit publication houses serving the scientific community—move into the online distribution and access of their journals, there is some concern with the prevailing cultural notion that “if it’s online, it should be free.” Of course, for-profit companies understand the basic business premise that “he who holds the digital archive holds the revenue stream.” Librarians already know that a subscription to Elsevier’s ScienceDirect can cost an institution several million dollars per year. Hence, in effect, the scientific community will be held hostage in acquiring access to these digital archives now and in the future, paying whatever price the market will bear (and in most non-Euramerican countries, that monetary price is extremely high because of a strong dollar and meager exchange rates. For example, two-thirds of the library budget at the South African Museum in Cape Town is spent on only three [3] geoscience journals! And, as the Rand continues to lose value against the dollar, journal subscriptions will have to be cut further. Consider that South Africa’s economy is in relatively good shape by world standards.) But, professional societies whose mission it is to distribute their science to their membership and beyond do not have profit in mind. Revenues generated through membership dues, regional and national conferences, books and other publications, and field trips just about cover the costs of operating the society during any fiscal year. There is good reason to have non-profit Foundations associated with societies, because these corporations can assist societies in maintaining financial stability during hard financial times.

Believe it or not, there is considerable cost associated with the production and maintenance of not only paper-copy journals but electronic journals, as well. Most of these costs now are being borne by the society and the vendor (e.g., AllenTrack, e-journal press). In addition to these fixed costs, societies also must begin to budget additional funds for the continuous upgrade in digital formats to the newest technologies and media imposed by market forces (who amongst you can still read your old 5 1/4” floppy diskettes?). Therefore, the move to electronic journals will not result in reductions in the membership subscription rates for obvious reasons. And, it will be nearly impossible for societies to remain viable unless individuals continue to associate themselves with professional organizations, which they seem to do whether or not they also opt for a journal subscription.

One of the biggest advantages of a geoscience journal consortium is the ability to code the journals to link seam-

lessly from one manuscript to another throughout the journal aggregate. As is available in electronic journals of sister disciplines, this allows a researcher to “follow the paper trail” on his/her desktop rather than running to the library to try and find a cited manuscript in the stacks (if they’re open and the library had a subscription to that particular volume) or request an interlibrary loan (which could take up to a week or longer, depending upon the source). True, a geoscience aggregate may require standardization of the journals within the collection to facilitate coding and reduce overall costs, but this probably is a small price to pay for the fluidity of access for both members and international markets. Incorporation of search engines that utilize Artificial Intelligence algorithms only can enhance the power of the aggregate and the database on which the aggregate is built. And, once back issues of all aggregate journals are moved into such a digital format, research capabilities should be advanced significantly. It is envisioned initially that conversion of previous issues would extend back 10 years (data indicate that citation of an article generally is maxed out 5 years after an article appears), with proposals being submitted to industry sponsors to assist in the archival conversions.

So, what is the status of the present proposal? The “big three” geological societies in the U.S.—GSA, AAPG, and SEG—have agreed to try to work together on developing and implementing the consortium. They are currently in the process of writing a detailed proposal that will be taken to industry and granting agencies requesting start up funds to get the aggregate off the ground. Discussions are ongoing with the Geological Society of London about their participation, and it is envisioned that other international geoscience organizations will be queried about participation once the aggregate is a reality. SEPM’s role is to communicate the goals of the project with other “smaller” geoscience societies in the U.S. and determine their interest in such a journal collaboration. Stay tuned.

Overall, as we pass on the editorial duties of PALAIOS, we are confident that there will be seamless continuity in all aspects of the journal. Additionally, we see that there are new opportunities in which the journal and SEPM can participate, designed to enhance the value of your membership and the role of the society in the geosciences. We would like to take this time to thank all the past, present, and future authors, Associate Editors, and reviewers for their efforts on behalf of PALAIOS and applied paleontology, without whom the journal would not be what it is today. Thank you for the opportunity to serve both the discipline and the community.

—ROBERT (BOB) A. GASTALDO
—CHARLES (CHUCK) E. SAVRDA

REFERENCES

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