

# **Streamlining the Stress! How Project Transfer is improving the process of journals moving between publishers**

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## **Abstract**

*This paper is a progress report on the UKSG project called Project Transfer. The Transfer Working Group is currently creating best practice guidelines and standards for the movement of titles between publishers. The ultimate aim of the group is to create an industry code of practice similar to the excellent work that the Project COUNTER organisation has done for journal usage statistics.*

## Introduction

In late 2005, the UK Serials Group (UKSG) recognised the need for an improvement in, and standardisation of, the process of journal titles moving between publishers. In an increasingly online-driven world the movement of a journal one publisher to another or from being self-published to commercially published, is significant particularly in relation to backfile ownership and access, Digital Object Identifiers (DOIs) and URLs. UKSG sponsors the popular library list-serve 'Lis-E-Journals', where librarians can raise issues concerning their electronic journal holdings. More and more frequently, the mails posted were concerning access and ownership issues for those titles that had recently moved from one journal publisher to another or from a self-publishing arrangement to that of a commercial publishing house. Some of the subject headings on the list read as:

*"Now You See It Now You Don't – Where Have the Backfiles and Archives of Contemporary Economic Policy and Economic Inquiry Gone?"*

*"Agricultural history - a lost journal?"*

*"Pediatrics - will this publisher ever get anything right?"*

The UKSG agreed to fund the creation of a working group, made up of publishers, intermediaries and librarians, to meet and discuss all of the issues encountered by the parties in the information chain. The first meeting occurred in late 2005 and highlighted the following main themes.

For Librarians, the issue of perpetual rights was seen to be a huge problem. When a title moves publisher, the librarian is unaware of the change until access is cut-off due to a change of URL or access arrangement. A particular frustration occurs when the librarian loses not only access to the newly published issues of the title, but also those back-volumes that they have paid for in the past. Another key problem is when a title moves between two publishers who offer different pricing models. For example, a librarian may receive full access to a title via their consortia deal, but when a journal moves, they have to resort to re-buying a journal subscription if the title moves to a publisher that does not offer a similar consortia-collection model.

Publishers highlighted how, upon receiving a journal, they often did not receive the required amount of subscription information in order to be able to ensure uninterrupted access to the journal for the newly-transferred subscribers, be they institutional or personal. Their call was for standards to ensure that a minimum amount of core information is supplied by the transferring publisher. They also emphasised that many of the contract decisions and timings of journal transfers were due to the editorial board or owner-society making decisions, without understanding the consequences to their library customers.

## Areas for Development

After much discussion, the Working Group condensed the issues into three key areas where we would like to see standards emerge:

1: **Communication:** The Group considered who, what, when and how parties within the info chain can learn about title transfers. Agents were identified as being key stakeholders in ensuring that this level of information was provided to its library customers, but agents in turn rely on timely information from publishers.

2: **Legacy:** ie: how to track and record which volumes of a transferred journal are available, where they are hosted, and how to identify who has rights to them. All agreed that a central repository of such data would be extremely valuable to cope with these issues.

3: **Packages and price models:** looking at how journal transfers are handled in the context of the big deal in terms of pricing, access rights and licensing.

## Phases

In order to roll out the project to the information community, the Group decided to divide the work into phases, ensuring that the three themes above are considered. The first phase would be the Transfer Code of Conduct for publishers. The second phase monitoring and compliance of the Code and the final phase would be the creation of a Transfer Web Service to try to deal specifically with the communication issues, centralising the details of any journal transfer on a central, accessible website.

**Phase One**, the Transfer Code of Conduct, was launched in first draft in April 2007 at the UKSG Annual Conference (UK Serials Group, 2007). The Project was praised widely by the library and publisher community and quickly gained support from the following publishers:

BioOne - [www.bioone.org](http://www.bioone.org) (23 August 2007)

Co-Action Publishing - [www.co-action.net](http://www.co-action.net) (4 September 2007)

Haworth Press - [www.haworthpress.com](http://www.haworthpress.com) (23 May 2007)

Mary Ann Liebert Inc Publishers - [www.liebertpub.com](http://www.liebertpub.com) (15 May 2007)

Multilingual Matters - [www.multilingual-matters.com](http://www.multilingual-matters.com) (27 July 2007)

SAGE Publications - [www.sagepub.co.uk](http://www.sagepub.co.uk) (11 May 2007)

Symposium Journals - [www.symposium-journals.co.uk](http://www.symposium-journals.co.uk) (11 May 2007)

Taylor & Francis Publishers - [www.tandf.co.uk/journals](http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals) (10 May 2007)

The Code was written to help publishers ensure that their journal content remains easily accessible by librarians and readers when it is the subject of a transfer between parties, and to ensure that the transfer process occurs with minimum disruption.

The principles of the Code of Conduct should apply to both the transferring and receiving publisher. Publishers who agree to align their procedures with the Code, and to apply them in practice when working with other, similarly aligned publishers, will be considered 'Transfer Compliant'. The Code is concerned primarily with online

content and not with print – except where the Code mandates that print subscription lists are communicated.

The Code is intended to be universally applied, regardless of the nature of the publisher, whether a society is involved or if one publisher is acquired by another. It is recognised that such a Code of Conduct needs to evolve and develop in line with the marketplace it purports to serve.

## **Emerging Issues**

However, in September 2007, the sign-up of publishers had slowed down, and feedback indicated that some sections of the publishing community were unhappy with the language and direction of the Code. The publishing organisations the Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers (ALPSP) and International Association of Scientific, Technical & Medical Publishers (STM) jointly wrote to Transfer to complain about the Code of Conduct. Their main issues were:

- [The Code did not] recognise the complexity of business models and approaches used by different publishers
- All ‘mandatory’ requirements should be removed
- Be less prescriptive in its description of how ongoing archival access is given, but be consistent with customer contract arrangements
- The prescribed transfer of the subscription lists is mentioned without respect to data protection or compensation
- The requirement for Transferring Publishers to continue to give one month’s access after Transfer is unnecessary if other factors within the Code are complied with
- General comments regarding the non-exclusive transferral of publishing rights from one publisher to another.

Nonetheless, overall ALPSP and STM were very supportive of Transfer and its aims. Project Transfer needs industry buy-in in order to be successful, but the Code must still be strong enough to protect the library customers and their end-users. Therefore, to ensure industry buy-in, the Working Group invited additional members to join the meetings. Springer, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford University Press, Elsevier joined existing members from Sage, Nature, ALPSP, and CrossRef as well as librarians and agents. The next steps for the Group were to redraft areas of the Code that were inconsistent or out of line with publisher processes.

As at January 2008, the fifth draft of the Code of Conduct has been completed, and is being circulated for discussion amongst the broader library and publishing community.

## **Roles & Responsibilities (Phase 1)**

It is hoped that the final versions of the Code can be publicised before the end of February 2008.

## TRANSFERRING PUBLISHER

Key responsibilities:

\*To ensure effective and rapid transfer of subscriber information to the Receiving Publisher and facilitate the continued access for subscribers to journal content

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- 1. Access to the title:** Where perpetual access rights have been granted, the Transferring Publisher must ensure continuance of access to their customers (on a non-exclusive basis) even if the Transferring Publisher will cease to host the online version of the journal after the effective transfer date.

NB: Transfer recommend that publishers follow the STM Guideline for STM Member Signatories, which says that 'Publishers with society journal contracts should always ensure that their customer licenses for electronic or online journal access do not exceed the scope of the license granted to them by the journal-owning societies (STM, 2006).

If the Receiving Publisher has received all of the content files but is unable to provide access on the effective transfer date the Transferring Publisher shall continue to provide access until the Receiving Publisher has made the files available.

- 2. Digital Content Files — current and archive (Backfile/Legacy):** With consideration to contract terms covering the journal transfer the Transferring Publisher will make the digital files available to the Receiving Publisher within four weeks of signature of the contract or (with the express written permission of the Sponsoring Society if the Transferring Publisher is not the journal owner) four months prior to the effective transfer date, whichever is sooner.
- 3. Subscription lists:** Subject to contract terms, the transferring publisher will make the subscription list of the journal available to the receiving publisher within four weeks of signature of the contract (or with the express written permission of the journal-owner if the Transferring Publisher is not the owner), four months prior to effective transfer date (whichever is sooner). Complying with appropriate data protection legislation, the list should include the following types of subscriber data:
  - Personal/Membership subscriber details
  - Institutional full price subscriber details (print, Online or print + online) – specifying which subscribers have perpetual access rights
  - Consortia Subscribers ) – specifying which subscribers have perpetual access rights
  - Lapsed subscribers

4. **Journal URL:** With consideration to contract terms covering the journal transfer and ownership rights, the Transferring Publisher will transfer any existing title-related journal domain name to the Receiving Publisher. If the journal title home page URL is part of the Transferring Publisher's domain then the Transferring Publisher will provide a URL link to the Receiving Publisher or create a redirect for a minimum of 12 months after the effective date of transfer.
  
5. **Communication:** The Transferring Publisher will use best endeavours to communicate journal transfer information to its subscribers, email table of content alert subscribers and relevant intermediaries as soon as possible after signature of the contract, and ideally no less than 1 month before the effective date of transfer.
  
6. **DOI name ownership:** The Transferring Publisher will follow the CrossRef DOI Name Ownership Transfer Guidelines to enable the transfer of control of DOI names to the Receiving Publisher (<http://www.crossref.org/02publishers/guidelines.html>). The Transferring Publisher will give its consent to the change of DOI name ownership as soon as possible after signature of the contract.

## RECEIVING PUBLISHER

Key responsibilities:

\*To ensure that content is made available to subscribers as soon as this is no longer the responsibility of the Transferring Publisher

\*To ensure that subscribers have uninterrupted access to the journal content

7. **Access to the title:** The Receiving Publisher will provide access to the journal from the effective transfer date. If the Receiving Publisher has received all digital content files, but is unable to provide access from the effective transfer date, they must permit the Transferring Publisher to continue to make the files available on a non-exclusive basis until the files are made available.
  
8. **Subscription lists:** The Receiving Publisher will contact all existing subscribers as soon as possible on receipt of the subscription lists (point 3), and make arrangements with them for continued access to future issues, subject to subscription renewal.
  
9. **DOI ownership:** The Receiving Publisher will follow the CrossRef DOI Name Ownership Transfer Guidelines to transfer control of DOI names from the Receiving Publisher (<http://www.crossref.org/02publishers/guidelines.html>). The Receiving Publisher will request consent for the transfer from the Transferring Publisher as soon as possible after signature of the contract.

## Future Developments

In addition to the redrafting of the Code, the Working Group will also re-establish itself, under the auspices of UKSG, as a more formal international committee composed of librarians, publishers and agents. The Transfer Committee will:

- Develop guidelines for publishers on practical aspects of implementing the Code of Conduct
- Oversee implementation of a Transfer Alerting Service that will provide a central location for publishers to register basic details of transfers, which will be available to libraries and other interested parties.
- Oversee compliance with the Code, conduct periodic reviews of the effectiveness of the Code and receive complaints on non-compliance with the Code
- Consider future revisions to the Code of Conduct

## Conclusion

The Working Group hopes that this version of the code will gain acceptance from other, larger publishers and will become an essential tool in the business of journal transfers. Indeed, if the Code is accepted for publishers, it could be used to encourage societies to update journal contracts, persuade stubborn societies to apply best practice and aid public relations using the Transfer logo to demonstrate compliancy and best practice. For Librarians it will help to ensure consistent access to users and improve renewal period and processes. Transfer would also encourage librarians to insist on Transfer compliancy in publisher agreements and license terms.

From a personal perspective, I am proud to have initiated Project Transfer, and have enjoyed chairing the Working Group. However, when leaving Blackwell to set up my company 'Burgundy,' I no longer had as much time to dedicate to the Project and in December 2007 handed over the Chair to Ed Pentz of CrossRef. Ed will be continuing the good work of Transfer and be contacted at: [epentz@crossref.org](mailto:epentz@crossref.org)

## References

STM 2006, Ensuring quality customer access to online content when society journals change publishers, <<http://www.uksg.org/transfer/press>>, accessed 26 January, 2008

UK Serials Group 2007, <<http://www.uksg.org/transfer/papers>>, accessed 26 January, 2008