

Documents

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Commercial journal publishers and university libraries: Retrospect and prospect

(1996) *Journal of Scholarly Publishing*, 27 (4), pp. 218-221. Cited 10 times.

Abstract

During the period 1955-95, the relationship between commercial publishers of scholarly journals and university libraries changed in two significant respects. The importance of each to the other grew, while, paradoxically, the relationship deteriorated. The period began with Robert Maxwell, acting for his Pergamon Press, beginning to exploit the enormous commercial potential in the publishing of scientific journals. As Pergamon and other large commercial publishers continued to capitalize on this potential, academic libraries, who were and are the primary customer base for scientific and technical journal publishing programs, found it increasingly difficult to justify the skewed proportion of their budgets spent on an ever-growing number of journal titles, and even harder to absorb the huge periodic increases in subscription prices. Because the nature of journal publishing makes each publisher of each title a monopolist, and because libraries are largely captive customers, the financial strain on libraries shows no sign of letting up. Libraries then are cancelling subscriptions, moving to a just-in-time service model, and are considering the case for the 'emergent model' for disseminating scientific and technical information, under which model scholarly communication would take place largely on an electronic network, reducing the power of the commercial publishers. Unless those publishers initiate significant change in their cost and access policies, we may well see journals publication as we now know it removed from their hands entirely. DENNIS CARRIGAN is assistant director of the School of Library and Information Science, University of Kentucky.

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ISSN: 11989742

Language of Original Document: English

Abbreviated Source Title: J. Sch. Publ.

2-s2.0-33749819223

Document Type: Article

Publication Stage: Final

Source: Scopus

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