

## STM US Annual Conference Goes Virtual 28-30 April 2020 1 SOCIETY DAY

This was a three-day event and it would seem that many of the registrants signed up for all three days. It is official that there were more registrants to the virtual than there had been face to face in previous years.

All the programmes can be reached through <https://www.stm-assoc.org/events/stm-us-conf-2020/>. The first day (28 April) was the Society Day which was dominated by the big self-publishing societies and associations who until recently used to gravitate towards the Association of American Publishers Professional and Scholarly Publishers Forum [PSP]. The audience was dominated by staffers of the big society players such as ACS, AIP, AGU, APS (Physics, Psychology and Physiology), ASME, ASPB, ASCO, ACM and IEEE. The chair of the Executive Planning Committee was Penelope Lewis, the Chief Scientist of the ACS – the biggest of them all – and she moderated this day of the conference.

The strapline for this day was **future proofing your society through transformation**

Ian Moss (CEO of STM) set the scene. COVID-19 has changed everything forever. Publishing was not collapsing because of past investments. Journals are only part of the work of societies. He urged the importance of Open Science on those present.

Jasper Simons, the Chief Publishing Officer of the American Psychological Association, explained in his keynote how APA had done this future-proofing. Even before COVID it was clear that traditional publishing models were too reliant on revenue from subscriptions by academic libraries (in their case 75% in 2015). He decided they were concentrating almost exclusively on one part only of their large membership, the research psychologists. His answer was diversification and his target audience was psychology undergraduates. You have to make a choice. You have to achieve a consensus among your leadership and bring along your internal stakeholders. It is hard work managing the process but worth it: the actual products/services described can be seen at <https://www.apa.org/pubs/digital-learning> - a prescient choice.

Processes have to be rethought as products are developed. At the same time current revenue earners could not be neglected: the mantra was: grow and protect. His Peter Drucker quotation was "The best way to predict the future is to create it." There were questions including one from Roger Schonfeld of Ithaka. Was the strategy working? The answer was that it seemed too early today but all the indications suggested that online learning was a sensible investment.

The following panel – **growth beyond the core** – followed naturally. The moderator Christine Dunn of Clarivate said that in discussions before the meeting it became clear that what her team were really talking about was now survival or present proofing. Casper Gratwohl of OUP spoke of a three-month rather than a three-year plan. Big schemes were put on hold while short-term/immediate revenue possibilities were explored either through licensing or partnership. Katherine Fryer of ACS homed in on the needs of her members as a starting point, currently provided for in a variety of silos. Cory Wiegert of Cancer Link had been brought in by ASCO to bring in a commercial focus to this audacious enterprise. He majored on the concept of the customer as the north star which appealed to his colleagues on the panel.

The conference moved on to another recognisable topic: **navigating the changing landscape of open access**. Colette Bean of the American Physiological Society had convened a panel of two publishers (one from Europe) and a senior librarian. Scott Delman of ACM described how his new Read and Publish business model originated and was carried through: <https://libraries.acm.org/subscriptions-access/acmopen>. It was built collaboratively with a number of university librarians. He had provided a lot of internal cost information to create trust. He did not think that he could have been so open in his previous jobs with commercial publishers. He had to convince those libraries who would have to pay more – no easy task. It is too early to know whether or not it worked. Tasha Mellins-Cohen, concentrated not on her own changes at the Microbiology Society but on the Society Publishing Coalition which she helped to found: [www.socpc.org](http://www.socpc.org)

There are 69 members including the ACM but mostly smaller. There are no costs and no membership fees. They do not want an unsustainable paywall to be replaced by an unsustainable “paywall”. They have worked constructively with initiatives like Plan S and UKRI in the UK. At a time when societies are in danger, they feel that this is important work.

Finally, the librarian spot. It was filled by Elaine Westbrook of UNC Chapel Hill. She admitted that librarians are not used to partnering with societies but their values are aligned. Her sustainable scholarship initiative started from the premise that the current system is broken: <https://sustainablescholarship.unc.edu/>. This was based on extensive discussions with staff and students in preparation for their Elsevier negotiations which (for her) demonstrated a lack of education among patrons. She made the central point that library budgets make current big deals unaffordable.

The next session was on **Cooperation amongst societies – shared initiatives**. The moderator was Brett Rubinstein, the Chief Commercial Publisher of GeoScienceWorld, an appropriate choice as GSW is a nonprofit collaborative and comprehensive resource for research and communications in the Earth Sciences. GSW works with societies, institutions, and researchers around the world and provides a single source of access to 46 preeminent scholarly journals, 2,000+ eBooks, and 4 million GeoRef records with specialized and map-based search capabilities and links to curated earth science research around the Web. This includes a recent development - a transfer Open Access journal for all the publishers involved – which has enhanced their capabilities. There were three speakers on his panel, all publishers.

Julie Gill of the new AMA Education Center had an impressive business background from outside the industry and worked for an organisation concerned with education of physicians than with traditional STM publishing. She promoted synergies across products which each had different business models and had brands which had to be allowed to shine through. There were also partnerships with other societies. Susan King of Rockefeller University Press (a unique university press which publishes journals only and those distinguished and established) spoke about the Life Science Alliance an open access transfer journal based on a partnership with two other players (<https://www.life-science-alliance.org/content/about-us>).

Finally there was a presentation the **Seamless Access** project (formerly RA21) by Ralph Youngen of ACS who explained how this collaborative initiative was taking off. The next step is to enable distributed entitlement to full text but alas there is still scepticism despite the object being to help researchers.

In answer to a question all speakers in this session agreed that it is easier to get decisions made under the threat of COVID including partnerships.

The final panel was given the ambitious title of **Framework for the Future** moderated by Thane Kerner, CEO of Silverchair. It was his view is that the present crisis presented an opportunity for societies to show their worth. All three speakers chimed in with this view. Only one publisher was involved: Brooks Hanson of AGU. He led the way on how you reach out to the general public and policy makers. It seemed to me (as a European) that they were looking for a US equivalent of Sense about Science (<https://senseaboutscience.org>) which is supported by some STM members in the UK. Lauren Kane, CEO of Data Think, suggested lay summaries represented a particular opportunity for societies. Steve Leicht, the President of Digital Science Research Solutions, made the point (among others) that sections of the public are not easy to reach.

The impressive concluding keynote was from Alix Vance currently the CEO of GeoScienceWorld on **Transforming for Growth and Adaptation** who returned to the first keynote. The way she saw the situation was similar: We as an industry already knew we needed to innovate and adapt and COVID has made that even more urgent. That said, effective change does not come from top-down strategies. It needs to be intrinsic to our cultures. To make that a reality, we need to learn some new techniques and lead differently. She also quoted Peter Drucker – “culture eats strategy for breakfast”. In August Vance takes over as the CEO of American Institute of Physics Publishing.