Establishing Your Journal's Online Presence

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The following is an excerpt from The Journal Editor's Definitive Guide to Digital Publishing a new free-to-download eBook resource from Scholastica.

Printed scholarly journals just aren't cutting it anymore. In the "information age" scholars expect to be able to access articles online. While debate remains as to whether scholars prefer online reading over print, there is no question that they are increasingly taking to Google Scholar and other online databases to conduct research.

The 2012 Ithaka S+R US Faculty Survey of over five thousand faculty members at four-year colleges found that over 60% of participants preferred "searching for a particular topic" and "exploring references" online. Similarly, the 2015 MIT Library Survey found that more than 80% of the community preferred electronic journals, collections of papers, and conference proceedings. There's no question that scholars are looking for content online.

Additionally, digital publishing offers opportunities for widely disseminating research that print journals simply cannot. By publishing online, entire journals and their individual articles can be searched for and found anywhere in the world in a matter of clicks. Journals that publish online can cut printing costs, creating opportunities to make research cheaply accessible or open access.

As *Amodern's* co-editor Scott Pound put it in a recent article, "online scholarly publication is the natural and inevitable response to this crisis of scholarly and educational communication." Rather than question whether we will segue from print to online-focused journal publishing, now is the time embrace this certain transition and find the best means of adapting to it.

To harness the power of online publishing, your journal obviously needs to have a web presence.

"We already have a website" you may say. But, is your website geared towards the digital researcher? It's important that journals avoid simply copycatting print practices on their publication websites, which unfortunately tends to be the default for many publications.

Develop Your Journal Website

Whether or not you're ready to go all in and publish solely online, it's vital for your journal to have a professionalized and user-friendly web presence. Designing a website is naturally very different than putting together a print journal layout, so if your journal does not have the resources to work with a professional web designer, setting up a website can be somewhat foreign. It can be easy to fall prey to print publishing tendencies, wherein your journal website becomes a static page of issues that link to lists of articles, which is not a very engaging digital reading experience. At the same time, you want to avoid adding too many components to your website that could detract from your journal's content.

In "Seven questions to ask yourself when you're redesigning your journal's website," Scholastica co-founder and lead user experience designer Rob Walsh shares some pointers to help you start to plan out or reevaluate your journal website:

- Avoid adding sections to your website that you won't be able to maintain, such as a "news and announcements" page that requires constant updating or an embedded social media feed you may forget to refresh.
- Communicate what authors need to know above all else. If your journal chooses to connect its website to that of a scholarly society, be sure that your journal's "about" and "author" pages are easy to access from the homepage.

- Ask yourself and your fellow editors if your website honestly looks like a place you would come to find and browse articles—if not, it's time to revisit the design.
- Adopt a responsive mobile-friendly website design.

This last point, *adopting a mobile-friendly design*, is especially important. Today, mobile web usage is rapidly exceeding that of PCs, and while it may presently seem unlikely to you that many scholars will choose to read entire journal articles on their mobile or tablet devices, it is highly likely that they will be surfing the web on a mobile or tablet device to find and bookmark relevant articles to read later. Having a mobile-friendly design is also an important step to ensure your journal has a high Google ranking. Starting in April 2015, Google expanded the use of mobile friendliness as a search-ranking signal.

When working on your journal website, consider other journal and content sites that you enjoy visiting. What do you like about them? How are they able to present content in an engaging way? Make sure to incorporate those elements into your journal's website.

The way your content is presented can make all of the difference in how often it is found, read, and shared. A great example of a quality journal website is that of *Sociological Science*. The journal uses its website homepage to showcase new and popular articles, in addition to having an "articles" tab to access all of the journal's content. *Sociological Science* also uses color and images to make its website and content more engaging, as well as a branded journal logo that viewers will remember. Hip to Google's game, *Sociological Science* has made its website mobile friendly.

From finding ways to showcase journal content to using images and branding and having a mobile-friendly design, there is a lot to take in when it comes to assessing your journal website. Given all of the components of web design and yours and your editorial board's limited time, you may find yourselves thinking, "what we have now is good enough." Don't get left behind in settling for a basic website design though, particularly if your website it not mobile ready! Now is the time to explore your options.

For more tips to make your academic journal more digitally focused check out Scholastica's new free-to-download eBook resource: *The Journal Editor's Definitive Guide to Digital Publishing*.