



## PeerJ – a new startup in the Open Access space

Pete Binfield, Co-Founder and Publisher, PeerJ

I have been associated with ISMTE since before it launched, and was honored to be invited to present to the recent ISMTE conference at Washington, DC, in my capacity as the co-Founder and Publisher of PeerJ (a recently launched startup company in the Open Access space). As a result of this presentation, I was asked to expand a little on both PeerJ and my thoughts on the future of Open Access for *EON*.

PeerJ was co-founded by myself (previously the Publisher of PLOS ONE) and Jason Hoyt (previously the Chief Scientist of Mendeley). We launched in June 2012 and have spent the last seven months building the Editorial Board (which now numbers some 800 academics) and the submission, peer review, and publication software, from scratch. We have been open for submissions since early December 2012, and we expect to publish our first articles sometime in mid-February 2013.

PeerJ drew considerable attention when it launched, and an overview of some of the coverage can be found at <https://peerj.com/about/reviews/>. Clearly the background of the Founders, as well as the financial backers (O'Reilly Media, and OATV, both backed by Tim O'Reilly) generated some interest, but ultimately the real attention was on things like our business model and product offerings, and these are the aspects that I was asked to expand on after the annual meeting.

PeerJ Inc. will have two publications—a preprint server called *PeerJ PrePrints* and a formally peer-reviewed Open Access journal called *PeerJ*, both of which will publish across the whole range of the Biological and Medical Sciences. *PeerJ* is a journal which reviews content only for scientific and methodological soundness, as is done at PLOS ONE for example.

The main way in which we differ from most Open Access publications is via our business model. Most OA publications charge an article processing fee for each article they publish. By contrast, PeerJ offers researchers a lifetime membership, for a single low price, giving them the ability to publish future articles with us for free. Therefore the business model is moved from one in which authors have to pay for every publication, to one in which authors

pay for a personal membership giving them lifetime publication rights.

All authors on a *PeerJ* paper must have a “paid Membership” and there are three Membership tiers, each conferring different rights. The three tiers are: **Basic** at \$99 (which allows a Member to publish one article per year, in *PeerJ*, for life); **Enhanced** at \$199 (which allows a Member to publish two articles per year, in *PeerJ*, for life); and **Investigator** at \$299 (which allows a Member to publish an unlimited number of articles per year, in *PeerJ*, for life). Members can upgrade from one tier to another at any time.

The only condition of Membership is to perform one “review” per year. We understand that finding people who are willing to peer-review articles is increasingly hard, therefore we are trying to encourage people to participate, at some level, by requiring each paying member to provide one “review” per year or risk their membership lapsing. For this requirement, though, a review can be as simple as a comment on a *PeerJ PrePrints* article or on a published *PeerJ* article, or it can be as substantial as a formally invited pre-publication review on a full submission to *PeerJ*.

However, the business model is only our most visible differentiator—we will differ in other ways too. For example, unlike most publishers we are going to focus on just one journal. This means we can devote our resources in a targeted way, concentrate on what is important, and make that one journal as good as it can possibly be. And of course the preprint server is unusual compared to most publishers. The combination of these two publications will mean that an author can have a well-rounded, end to end, publishing experience with us.

We will also be encouraging Open Peer Review—specifically we will encourage reviewers to identify themselves to authors and we will give authors the option of publishing their full peer review history alongside their published article. This practice has been successfully employed by *The EMBO Journal*, for example (*EMBO* discussed their transparent peer review process in the November 2012 issue of *EON*), and we hope that it will encourage an open and constructive review process.

We believe that PeerJ takes the best elements of traditional academic publishing, and combines them with the latest thinking on how to deliver and disseminate research. It is close enough to established publication models that authors can feel comfortable with it, yet innovative in many key respects (the business model; the incentives built into the system; the open peer review; the preprint server and so on).

As to the future of Open Access, I am on record predicting that Open Access is rapidly disrupting the subscription model, and that very soon it will become the way in which the majority of scholarly content is published. Why do I think that?

A recent study by Laakso and Bjork (<http://www.biomedcentral.com/1741-7015/10/124>) reported that “immediate availability” Open Access content made up approximately 11.6% of all articles indexed by Scopus in 2011, and that this number is rising at approximately 1% per year. Clearly this is a somewhat low percentage, with apparently slow growth; however, the same article reports a 16.9% proportion of OA if you include “delayed” OA—which is starting to look a little more significant. So what does this say about the future growth of OA? David Lewis recently published an article in ACRL

called “The Inevitability of Open Access”(<http://crl.acrl.org/content/73/5/493.full.pdf+html>) in which he applies a theory of disruption developed by Clay Christensen to an earlier data set from Laakso and Bjork. In this analysis, he predicts a “best case” (depending on your point of view!) date of 2017 for 50% of all published content to be Open Access (and a “worst case” of 2021). I am an optimist, so I subscribe to the “best case” prediction, and actually the most recent data from Laakso and Bjork would appear to keep his prediction on the “best case” curve.

So if Lewis is right (and I think he is) then where does this leave us? It leaves us within five to eight years of essentially all journal articles (at least in STM) being published under some form of Open Access. It takes a while for a journal to become established (it has taken PLOS ONE some seven years to get to its present size, which is an impressive 23,500 published articles in 2012 alone) and so my message is that publishers need to start adapting now if they want to remain a viable publication venue in the near future. Of course, we believe that PeerJ will represent such a venue, but we fully expect to see other innovative and dynamic developments in this space in the next few years. This is an exciting time to be in our industry!

## Overly Honest Researchers

The articles submitted to us are written carefully in formal language, but I sometimes wonder what the authors would say if they were being painfully open about their research methods. These tweets appeared on Twitter with the hashtag #OverlyHonestMethods:

- Coffee did more for this project than the Principal Investigator.
- When I say “research indicates,” I mean I read an abstract on PubMed because the full paper was behind a paywall.
- I used students as subjects because rats are expensive and you get too attached to them.
- The eppendorf tubes were “shaken like a polaroid picture” until that part of the song ended.
- You can download our code from the URL supplied. Good luck downloading the only postdoc who can get it to run, though.
- The results of the study were presented in third person passive voice to maximize the sciencyness of the paper.
- We used jargon instead of plain English to prove that a decade of grad school and postdoc made us smart.
- Blood samples were spun at 1500 rpm because the centrifuge made a scary noise at higher speeds.
- We did it this way because the grad student was trained by a postdoc trained by a grad student who claimed he knew how to do it.
- Incubation lasted three days because this is how long the undergrad forgot the experiment in the fridge.
- We did experiment 2 because we didn’t know what to make of experiment 1.