What Does a Managing Editor Do All Day?
An Analysis of Emails Received in an Editorial Office

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Objectives

1. Use detailed email data to categorize types of managing editor tasks
2. Identify the tasks managing editors do daily
3. Use detailed email data to identify core competencies of a managing editor

Background

Through focus groups and a survey, ISMTE has been working to develop a picture of managing editor core competencies. Because many, if not most, managing editors work remotely from their editors-in-chief, societies, publishers, authors, and reviewers, the vast majority of a managing editor's tasks are assigned via email. Additionally, questions from authors, editors, and reviewers tend to come through email (often via online peer-review management systems). With this in mind, it seems that an analysis of a managing editor's email inbox would provide an answer to the question, "What does a managing editor do all day?"

Methods

Choosing three months (July, November, 2016; March 2017) at random, I entered every email I received into an Excel spreadsheet, capturing the following data: sender, email synopsis, and my action taken in response. The following emails were excluded from data collection: spam, acknowledgements to my email (i.e., "thanks! Got it!"), and personal emails (i.e., inside jokes with colleagues). I used the data provided to categorize the emails into associated tasks (peer review management, production, ethics issues, article promotion, journal business, society collaboration, etc.).

Results

The three months surveyed showed remarkable consistency in the number of emails received (July: 342; November: 346; March: 341). In all three months, most emails were related to peer review (49.7%, 54.6%, 50.0%) and production (17.3%, 15.0%, 22.3%). Outside of peer review and production, the other most common subjects of emails were: society-related issues (i.e., help editing society brochures, preparing for staff meetings, non-journal related projects), personal education (i.e., ISMTE newsletters, Wiley Society Newsletter, Publons information), journal business (i.e., AE stipend processing, page budget negotiations), PR and promotion (i.e., social media and society-sponsored PR), and ethics (i.e., plagiarism concerns).
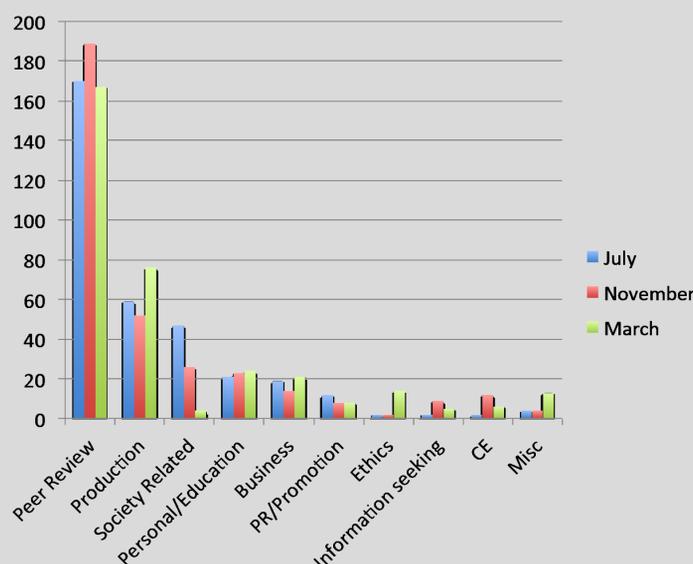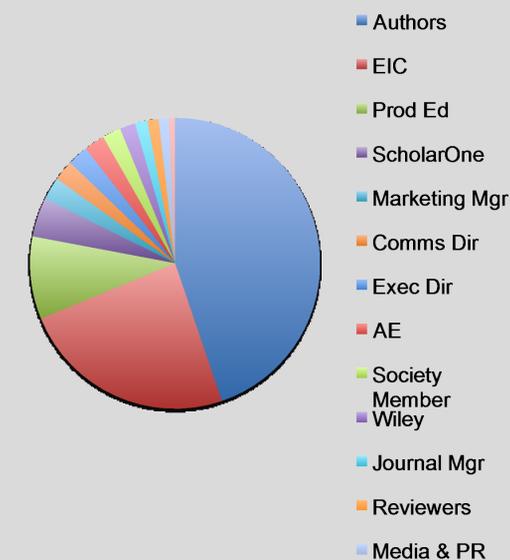

While peer review and production reliably made up the bulk of the emails, non-peer review or production activities were more variable from month to month, given the differences in work assigned (i.e., a non-journal related project completed by October, executive director turnover in the fall, a plagiarism concern arising in March).
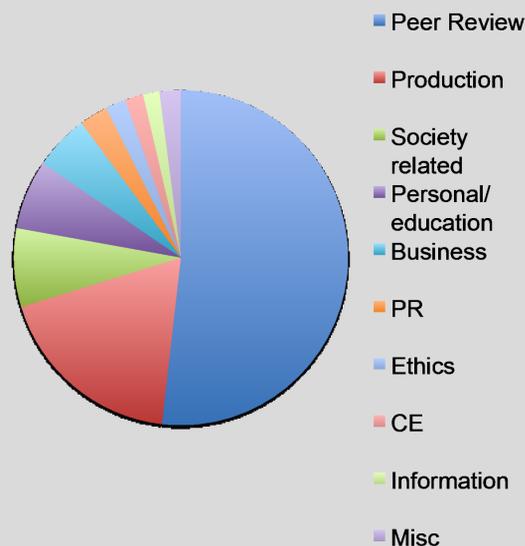
Overall, for the three months observed, nearly 70% of emails received were in reference to the peer review (51.1%) or production (18.2%) processes. While this study did not track the time spent on each of these emails, to say that managing editors spend 70% of their time on peer review and production seems reasonable.

Email correspondents

Legend: Authors, EIC, Prod Ed, ScholarOne, Marketing Mgr, Comms Dir, Exec Dir, AE, Society Member, Wiley, Journal Mgr, Reviewers, Media & PR

Managing editors are often the hub of communication between the society, publisher, authors, editors, and reviewers. The data collected here reflect that role. Given the primacy of production and review, it is unsurprising that more than three quarters of emails came from authors (37.9%; many of these auto-generated through ScholarOne), the editor-in-chief (20.3%), the production editor (7.8%), and ScholarOne (4.4%). The society's communications/marketing director (my immediate supervisor with the society) and communications/marketing manager (the other member of my division) were the most-prolific correspondents outside of the production and review process. As a group, society colleagues sent 15.4% of emails received.

For the period studied, the top 5 journal-related tasks (and associated correspondents) were:

1. Peer review (authors, EIC, AEs, reviewers)
2. Production (production editor, EIC, authors)
3. Journal business (Wiley journal manager, EIC, society exec director, communications director)
4. PR & promotion (society marketing manager, media/PR director)
5. Ethics (EIC, Wiley journal manager, authors, ISMTE)

Study Limitations

Email ≠ time. While many responses to peer review and production emails are pro forma and take very little time, other emails (i.e., a question about authorship dispute) can take up hours or days of work.

Each email was only given one category. For instance, an acceptance letter from the editor-in-chief could be considered a *peer review* (it completes that process), *production* (it begins that process), or *ethics* task (plagiarism screening is part of the acceptance process). The single author of this poster made these judgments. Having a second person to 'code' the tasks and an inter-rater comparison would improve the accuracy of the data.

Statistics were not analyzed. This is a descriptive view of emails received. Statistics were not analyzed to determine if any results were significant.

Conclusions

The *Journal Prosthodontics* is a solo-staffed, society-owned, Wiley-published journal. Therefore, while the data presented here may accurately reflect this and similar journals, a larger, publisher-owned, or self-published journal might have different results. Given the data presented, this study identifies the following core competencies of a managing editor:

1. Excellent communication skills; ability to communicate journal goals consistently with varied journal stakeholders
2. Attention to detail for a successful, efficient peer review process
3. Ability to multitask, with responsibilities as varied as business and administration, scientific integrity, and grammar/proofreading skills
4. Desire to stay up-to-date on issues in the field

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