

## The Publisher and the Editor: Friend or Foe



Publisher vs editor: the stereotype for generations has often been said to resemble the relationship between Bob Cratchit and Ebenezer Scrooge in Charles Dickens's story, *A Christmas Carol*.<sup>1</sup> The miserly publisher tightens the strings on the purse while the industrious editor constantly toils to produce a worthy product despite imposed penury.

In my (JSA) more-than 35 years of experience with 6 different publishers, I have found this picture of penury and dictatorial management to be completely false. In fact, few of my professional relationships have been more satisfying and rewarding than my multiple interactions with publishers of scholarly books and journals. Starting with Little, Brown, and Company (Lin Richter) in 1976 and progressing to my recent colleagues at Elsevier (Pamela Poppalardo and Jane Grochowski, as well as Glen P. Campbell, now with the *British Medical Journal*), I have profited enormously from my interactions with these professional, experienced, and knowledgeable individuals. Their suggestions have invariably improved my organizational skills, my writing, my editing, and a number of other skill sets that I employ in my daily scholarly work schedule.

The realm where editors and publishers meet is founded on a single overarching principle, effective communication. The goal of both parties is to communicate varied information to a professional or lay public in the most efficient and comprehensible manner. Not all authors are equally skilled in organizing and writing. One of the jobs of the editor and the publisher working together is to guarantee that the contributor's message is presented in the clearest possible manner. Of course, there are also financial considerations to be addressed. Editors would like their books or journals printed on the highest quality, acid-free paper with multiple exquisite color figures and diagrams. However, unless the publication is going to enjoy wide readership with reliable sales or advertising/sponsorship, the highest priced paper and multiple full-color reproductions may not be economically feasible. The publisher of scholarly material, in my experience, works with the editor to produce the highest-quality product that is consistent with financial reality. The economics of book or journal

publishing must be understood by the editor. It goes without saying that sound financial planning on the part of the publisher is essential to the continuance of effective and accurate scholarly communication. The most effective editors are well aware of this principle and its foundation in reality.

If we accept the idea that effective communication is the goal of both publisher and editor, what are the specific demands that each must satisfy in order to produce a high-quality scholarly product? For the editor, at least 9 needs must be met by the publisher:

- Rapid turnaround of manuscripts with quick and accurate communication with the editor and the authors, especially with regard to questions raised during the editing process;
- Commitment to produce the most readable, attractive, and aesthetically pleasing publication;
- Adherence to economic realities but with a constant effort to publish the very best quality book or journal that it is both affordable and demonstrates constant excellence in all its aspects;
- In the field of journal publishing, ensuring that user-friendly digital electronic versions are easily accessible to the reading audience and that the material published will have the maximum likelihood of being cited;
- Staff in the publishing office that are able, available, and affable;
- Assistance with all aspects of electronic journal and book chapter submission as well as Webmaster expertise to assist the editor when needed;
- In this era of potential scientific misconduct, aid in identifying plagiarism by employing software that will rapidly screen all submissions;
- A sales force that guarantees extensive library contracts;
- Ability of the publisher to find advertising revenue that leads to profitability of the journal or book.

What are the corresponding needs that the publisher requires of the editor?

- An editorial office that communicates clearly, efficiently, and quickly with speedy and accurate galley processing and ability to attract high-quality copy;
- An editorial office that is well organized;
- Ease of contact with the editor-in-chief and the managing editor with the same availability, ability, and affability that is shown by the publishing office;

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- An editor-in-chief and managing editor who are practical, helpful, efficient, industrious, and free of arrogance;
- Assistance in planning and production of a journal that will have a high impact factor and a high PERC score;
- A first-rate editorial board for the journal and the ability to recruit expert authors who contribute to the journal or text.

Finally, what about the needs of that most important component of the communication connection, the reader or the reviewer of manuscripts? If this group is not satisfied, the entire process of effective communication is severely hindered. Among other things, the reader/reviewer requires:

- Timely arrival of print and electronic versions of the journal;
- Easy, friendly, electronic access to the journal or text for reading or review;
- A facile and user-friendly process for downloading of articles and PowerPoint slides in order to save these materials for personal use in the future;
- Fast and intelligible communication when required with the journal editorial office involving the same degree of availability, ability, and affability that characterize the interaction between the publisher and the editor;
- A user-friendly, rapid, and efficient electronic submission/review system.

To conclude, the process that leads to effective communication in scholarly publishing requires vigilance on the part of both the publisher and the editor to ensure that the message delivered is clear, concise, easily accessible, and provides value for the reader. In our current world of efficient and high speed of delivery of scholarly matter, the relationship between the publisher and the editor should resemble that of a perfectly matched couple who understand each other's needs and constantly strive to satisfy these requirements in the most rapid and efficient manner possible.

As always, I appreciate comments concerning my editorials placed on our *AJM* blog: [www.amjmed.org](http://www.amjmed.org).

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## Reference

1. Dickens C. *A Christmas Carol*. London: Chapman and Hall; 1843.