

Starting a New Journal: Nuts, Bolts, and Open Access

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Moderator Sheehan Misko meant to describe the process of launching a journal as daunting, but when by a quick slip of the tongue she said “devastating,” the attendees of this session laughed in agreement while seeking insight into the process of launching new publications that might prove useful to their own future or ongoing endeavors.

Cara Kaufman began the session with a framework for new product development. When considering a new publication, much research and analysis is necessary. Kaufman stated that a thorough review covers gap analysis, reviewing competitors, stakeholder interviews, and general strategy sessions. If deemed acceptable, the idea needs further screening by industry members. New concepts need to be tested with end users, not just thought leaders or other industry experts. End-user feedback can show whether a concept will be valued and can help refine it, according to Kaufman.

Moving on, Kaufman showed the audience a questionnaire created by Kaufman Willis Fusting & Company that helps answer questions related to the production, marketing, financial, and editorial needs of a new publication. She stressed the importance of this approach, as publishers need to be prepared to cope with the possibility of lots of success as well as no success.

“Every new product comes with risk, and how much money you invest should relate to the amount of risk,” said Kaufman. “Maybe a loss leader is fine, but maybe it’s not and it’s important to have a sense of that at the start.”

Offering another perspective, Angela Cochran walked through her experience launching new journals for ASCE, a large society that is mandated to publish the ideas of its members. Cochran noted that incentives motivate smaller groups in the organization to propose new journals. The decision to move forward with an idea was not described as being made after a lot of financial research; Cochran indicated if an idea is accepted it moves forward quickly.

The importance of keeping track of all the small details that can be overlooked was emphasized by Cochran. ASCE uses a spreadsheet to track tasks needed to launch a journal, including who is responsible for each task and when it is due, as well as to track a number of identifiers and metadata, from ISSN through DOI. That spreadsheet becomes an authority file. This is important according to Cochran because some of the tasks will need to be followed up on years later; a journal must be three years old for Scopus, and inclusion in PubMed can be applied for only after 40 papers and 12 months.

Cochran offered some parting advice to attendees for navigating a journal launch, noting that to succeed you need to be organized, send updates out the core stakeholders often, and always use the spreadsheet—don’t retype things like ISSN manually and risk typos, note when changes have been made, and follow up on long-term things.

The final speaker of the session was Katherine Egan Bennett, sharing her experience of launching an open-access journal for the American Society for Radiation Oncology. Launching the publication took nearly three years, with a lot of time spent convincing society membership that the journal was needed. A desire to capture content leakage from the existing ASTRO journals helped make the case for a new publication. At the time, their flagship journal held a 31% accept rate and was rejecting hundreds of submissions each year.

The new journal launched successfully in January 2016, supported by author fees. The first volume launched with 56% accept and 39% reject rates, with 6% withdrawn, which Bennett noted showed open access is a publishing model, but it does not mean you will publish everything. Looking back on the process, Bennett offered up some lessons learned, saying it is important to build connections with editorial boards of existing journals in order to communicate the scope of new journal.