

## Scientific retractions may become easier to spot as Retraction Watch finds new partner

Five-year deal will share journal watchdog's widely used database with Crossref in return for stable funding

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Retraction Watch, the influential website and database that tracks retractions in scholarly literature, is joining forces with another publishing nonprofit, Crossref, in hopes of helping researchers and journals flag articles that have been retracted and sustain the literature's veracity. The deal announced today will link information about the 42,000 retractions in [Retraction Watch](#)'s database to [Crossref](#)'s digital object identifier system in return for \$775,000 over 5 years.

The arrangement "is huge and like a dream come true for what I'd want in retraction information," says Jodi Schneider, an information scientist at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. She led a project in 2020 involving publishers and researchers about [how to reduce scholars' inadvertent citing of "zombie papers,"](#) which live on in scholarly works even after retraction. [The group's recommendations](#) included maintaining a public, regularly updated database.

Founded by two biomedical reporters in 2018, the Retraction Watch database includes the reason for retraction and is believed to be the largest of its kind. It is the best source of such data because it is expertly curated and covers multiple disciplines, Schneider says. Creating such databases using automated methods has been difficult because retraction notices contain nuances and inconsistencies. “Retraction Watch is the ideal group to be maintaining this database because they are journalist watchdogs who are interested in understanding what’s getting retracted,” Schneider says.

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Until now, Retraction Watch has funded this work by collecting licensing fees from developers who use the database to assist readers. For example, the website Zotero, which allows scientists to store information about papers for future reference, flags retracted papers based on Retraction Watch’s data. Retraction Watch will no longer collect those fees. Now that publishers can get the same data for free, this could incentivize them to expand their own methods to catch retracted papers in citation lists and remove them before the citing paper is published, Schneider says. The move also frees scholars from having to sign data-access agreements for research on patterns in retractions (for which Retraction Watch didn’t charge).



Adam Marcus (left) and Ivan Oransky, co-founders of Retraction Watch, in 2011 RETRACTION WATCH

Crossref’s financial support—\$175,000 up front and \$120,000 each year, with an annual 5% increase—will allow Retraction Watch’s nonprofit parent, the Center for Scientific Integrity, to employ an additional staff member in addition to the one who currently maintains the database, says Ivan Oransky, a co-founder of Retraction Watch and full-time editor-in-chief of Spectrum, a news website focused on autism. He and fellow co-founder Adam Marcus, a full-time editorial director at Medscape, will continue not to draw salaries for their Retraction Watch work.

The Crossref deal does not directly involve the journalism about retractions published on the Retraction Watch blog, founded by Oransky and Marcus in 2010. But Oransky says he hopes he will have more time to expand those operations, which are funded through other grants and donations. (*Science*’s news section has published freelance articles written by Oransky and Marcus and other Retraction Watch contributors, and collaborated with them on [a 2018 news package that analyzed data in Retraction Watch’s database](#).)

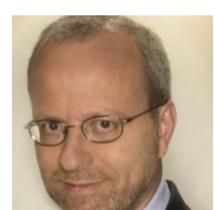
Oransky adds that he sought funding support from a nonprofit such as Crossref because it eliminates the potential conflict of interest created when Retraction Watch accepted licensing fees from publishers to use Retraction Watch's data while at the same time publishing news articles that frequently include criticisms of the publishers' handling of retractions. (Crossref will continue to fund its operations through fees from publishers.) Those companies "never tried to influence our coverage," Oransky says. But, "This is a better solution." Finding it "has been keeping me up at night and a motivating sort of energy for at least 5 years."

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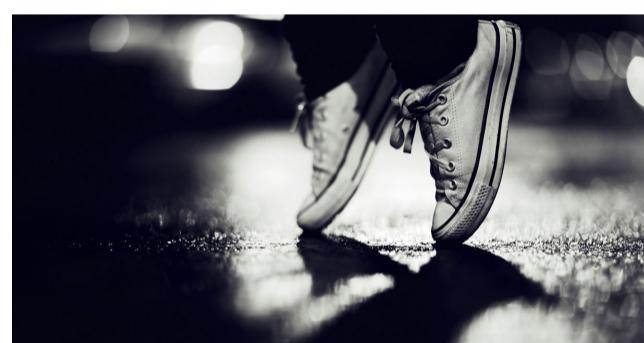


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