

Editorial Manager: Interview with Richard Wynne

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Practically all scientific journals now use web-based systems for paper submissions and peer review. This saves the authors a lot of time compared to paper submissions by postal mail (until 15 years ago) or email (until 5 years ago). Unfortunately the submission process is still far from perfect and requires authors to spend many hours formatting manuscripts, references and images instead of focusing on the scientific content.

The tools (word processors, reference managers, graphics programs, etc.) that most authors use to write manuscripts have become more sophisticated every year, but often don't help much with creating structured documents. Structure is the most important feature of a scientific manuscript (title, authors, abstract, materials and methods, references, etc.), and this is much more relevant than the layout (fonts, page margins, etc.).

There are two different approaches to create structured manuscripts. Authors could use tools such as the Microsoft Word Article Authoring Add-in or Lemon8-XML and submit structured manuscripts in the NLM DTD XML format. Or journal submission systems could improve the process of creating structured manuscripts from standard word processor files (e.g. Microsoft Word). To better understand the second option, I asked Richard Wynne from Aries a few questions about Editorial Manager.

1. Can you describe what Editorial Manager is and does?

Editorial Manager is like plumbing for scholarly publishing. It manages the flow of scholarly manuscripts from submission to acceptance. Like good plumbing it should be invisible, reliable and afford some luxury.

While most of us could theoretically do our own plumbing, we usually discover that it's better to pay a professional. It's the same with online peer review systems. Most scholarly societies, publishers and university presses could develop and host their own workflow systems; but have discovered that it's less messy and less expensive to use a commercial solution such as Editorial Manager.

More than 3,100 journals from 150 publishers have adopted Editorial Manager. In the interest of fairness, I should mention other available solutions:

- Open Journal Systems,
- Manuscript Central,
- eJournal Press,
- BenchPress.

Thanks to a healthy competitive environment, online peer review is one of the most innovative areas of scholarly publishing.

2. In what document formats can manuscripts be submitted to Editorial Manager? Can manuscripts be submitted from online word processors such as Google Docs?

There are virtually no technical limitations on the types of files that can be loaded into Editorial Manager. However:

- Only some file types (such as Office, LaTeX, and image formats etc.) can be automatically converted to PDF format. Other types of file (e.g. Video or audio files) can be uploaded and are accessible during workflow from links in the generated PDF, and from the manuscript file inventory for authorized editors.
- Superimposed on this technical handling is journal policy. Acceptable submission items (e.g. manuscript, data set etc.) are configured by the journal according to their idiosyncratic workflow preferences. So while one journal using Editorial Manager may permit the upload of supplemental data, another may choose not to make this option available.

We have not interfaced with Google Docs at an API level, but this would become a priority if large numbers of authors found it a productive authoring tool for scholarly manuscripts. In the interim Google Docs provides many supported download file format options such as RTF.

3. Why do most publishers prefer not to have manuscripts submitted as PDF file(s)?

Editorial Manager does support upload of manuscripts in PDF format. However many publishers discourage this practice for good reasons:

- Some journals ask reviewers to directly edit the manuscript in word processing format – obviously not possible if the author uploads a PDF.
- If the manuscript is accepted, the publisher will need access to original source files to undertake copy editing, image formatting, composition etc. Obtaining source files up-front allows the publisher to accelerate the workflow and eliminates the time-consuming and cumbersome step of obtaining source files from the author after acceptance. Publishers that do accept PDF submissions must ensure that subsequently submitted source

files match the revised manuscript that was accepted by the editors as an error prone and unnecessary step.

It's unfortunate that publishers don't take the time to explain their reasoning regarding PDF submissions. This contributes to the scholar street wisdom that publishers are out of touch.

4. Can manuscripts be transferred from preprint servers such as arXiv or Nature Preceedings?

Yes, manuscripts can be directly transferred from the arXiv server by entering the appropriate arXiv number during the submission process. Editorial Manager then automatically collects the source files from the arXiv server. The feature is journal configurable.

We have not yet implemented a similar feature for Nature Precedings.

5. How does Editorial Manager support the NLM DTD format? Can manuscripts be submitted in that format?

Editorial Manager does process files with structured DTDs, but that's not really the point of your question. Here's the issue: reliably structured manuscripts theoretically present workflow benefits:

- During submission, manuscript metadata could be automatically harvested from the file, thereby avoiding author re-keying of title, abstract, etc.
- Journal styling and composition could be applied automatically, thereby avoiding manual steps currently required to structure unformatted manuscripts – a massive cost and time saving.

Today these benefits remain largely theoretical because they depend entirely on authors uploading standardized, structured manuscripts. The question is: who should have ultimate responsibility for manuscript structure quality? In my opinion not authors – their primary focus should be manuscript content not manuscript format. Part of the publisher's role is to take care of manuscript structuring. Trying to offload this responsibility to authors is not a good use of their time.

Eventually authoring tools could solve the problem by enabling transparent insertion of structure during manuscript authoring, but initiatives in this area are still immature in terms of technical feasibility, operational convenience and economic sustainability. Until this changes, we're focused on adding server-side tools to Editorial Manager that don't place any extra technical or financial burden on the author.

6. Does Editorial Manager help with the formatting of bibliographies, e.g. by checking the references against online databases or the formatting of references in the journal style?

Yes, Editorial Manager provides this facility, but format styles are determined by the individual journals/publishers that use the system.

Journals can select an Editorial Manager option that automatically links author submitted bibliographies to PubMed and/or CrossRef. The system can also format the author's bibliography to journal style. This means that we broadly accept whatever style the author has used. We power the service with eXtyle. The output of the process is clean XML of the bibliography.

This is an excellent example of how Editorial Manager improves workflow without displacing work back to the author. Alternative approaches are burdensome to the author because they require her to pre-format the bibliography or mandate the purchase/use of reference management tools and plug-ins.

7. What is the preferred format for graphics? Can Editorial Manager help with conversions into a different format (e.g. TIFF to PDF)?

Editorial Manager has no preferred graphic format. The preference is determined by the journal/publisher using the system.

Preferences are the result of the publisher's production and content delivery objectives. For example, a journal that re-draws graphics may not care about format. A journal that produces high quality print may reject RGB images, but RGB images would typically be acceptable for an online-only journal.

Editorial Manager does include an automatic image checking option. Journals that configure this feature can provide feedback to authors concerning the acceptability of submitted images. Just to be clear, this tool provides feedback and education, it does not prevent submission.

8. Does Editorial Manager support the SWORD (Simple Web-service Offering Repository Deposit) protocol?

Back in 2002 Aries proposed an XML-based standard and anticipated that the "Submission and Manuscript eXchange Format" (SMXF) would provide a system-neutral standard for the exchange of manuscript metadata and content. The broad adoption of such a standard would provide key benefits (see 2002 Press Release). Despite our best efforts, there was little interest at the time, and as a consequence Editorial Manager supports dozens of XML input/output formats. So, from our point of view, the emergence of a standardized manuscript transfer format is a great boon and I've no doubt that SWORD deposit will soon be an Editorial Manager feature.

9. How can authors give feedback, e.g. to report problems or request features?

Most user feedback comes indirectly via publishers so that they can filter editorial and policy questions. However, we are also happy to hear suggestions directly from users. They can reach us at marketing@edmgr.com. Users are also invited to talk to their journals/publishers about participating in User Group meetings (London and Boston) or the Listserv discussions.

10. What are your responsibilities within the Editorial Manager team?

A distinguishing characteristic of Editorial Manager is that it is genuinely the result of a broad-based team effort. I joined Aries approximately 10 years ago and have been privileged to participate in the growth of Editorial Manager from idea to sustainable solution processing more than 1,000,000 submissions per year. Along the way I have forged key relationships, and led the product management, sales and marketing team.

11. What did you do before starting to work in the Editorial Manager team?

After graduating from the University of Edinburgh, I started my career in software but jumped at the opportunity to start a multimedia company for SilverPlatter in the early 90's. Working with scientists we published interactive video, audio, graphics and text on CD-ROM. In those days few scientists owned CD-ROM drives so I'd carry one around with me. At one point I remember a professor at Cornell excitedly showing me something called Mosaic and thinking: that's just hypertext. Since then I have been a lot more inquisitive about innovations that originate in academia!

12. Do you want to talk about future plans for Editorial Manager?

There are many opportunities to innovate and improve the experience for authors, reviewers and editors; and we work on a rich list of suggestions and enhancements. We do not announce innovation details until they are close to being deployed, but there are a couple of great releases coming this year.

Recently we received the following comment from an editor: Editorial Manager has the "feel" of actually responding to the user. I think that a number of subtleties account for this impression, including the language used, the flow of the algorithm, and the customized real time feedback to the user. Our ambition is to achieve and surpass this level of satisfaction for all users.