

Thomson Scientific launches ResearcherID to uniquely identify authors

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Thomson Scientific last week announced ResearcherID. ResearcherID tries to solve a problem that has annoyed me for many years. In contrast to papers and journals, authors are not associated with a unique ID in databases such as PubMed. You are lucky if you have an uncommon last name that contains only letters from the English alphabet. For the rest of us, a typical PubMed search for your name will also pick up papers by other authors. In my case for example papers by my cousin Mathias Fenner.

The missing unique ID for authors makes it impossible to automate the creation of publication lists for authors or institutions. You already can get email alerts or RSS feeds of papers published by a specific person (colleague or competitor), but without unique ID, this is tricky. ResearcherID will also automate the maintenance of your Hirsch number (for those interested in this kind of metric).

Scientists interested in ResearcherID should register at the researcherID.com website. Registration is currently by invitation only.

There is one major problem with ResearcherID. It is not clear from the press release of who owns and controls this information. This is a very sensitive issue and Thomson Scientific a major player in this field. Remember Microsoft Passport? The majority of web users was uncomfortable having a central user ID and password managed by Microsoft. The service eventually failed, and we now have the open standard Open ID. Similarly, ResearcherID can only work if the user database is either shared openly or hosted by someone like the NIH.