

A few questions about author identifiers

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April 13, 2009

The scientific articles we write are uniquely identified by Digital Object Identifiers (DOI). Many people believe that we also need unique identifiers for the authors of those articles. Some of the arguments why author identifiers could be very helpful are found in this interview with Geoffrey Bilder, this Researcher Identification Primer, and this FriendFeed discussion. There is also an increasing number of scientific papers on the topic, including:

- Scientific publishing: Identity crisis (Nature)
- What's in a name? (EMBO Reports)
- I Am Not a Scientist, I Am a Number (PLoS Computational Biology)
- Are you ready to become a number? (Science)
- Metadata for the metaconsortium (Nature Genetics)

Although most people agree that we need author identifiers for scientists, many details of how this should be implemented are not clear. I've listed some of the issues below. If possible, please take a few minutes and answer the questions for yourself in this poll.

1. What is the purpose of an author identifier for scientists?

- Unique identifier
- Author profile
- Authentication
- Other:

An author identifier should obviously uniquely identify an author. Some people like to add other functions, namely the ability to add a profile (e.g. a web page listing all papers of an author) and authentication. I think that the latter two functions can better be provided by a combination of unique identifier and some of today's tools (see also question #10).

2. What is the best name for an author identifier for scientists?

- Author ID (Scopus)
- Researcher ID (Thomson Reuter)
- Contributor ID (CrossRef)

- Digital Author Identifier
- Other:

We need a name for author identifiers. Some of the names above are already associated with an existing (or planned) service. Just pick a name and stick with it.

3. The author identifier system should be used for:

- Authors
- Reviewers
- Editors
- Database submitters
- Bloggers
- Commenters
- Other:

I believe that the author identifier system should be applied to all of the above. But it doesn't have to be implemented for all these uses at the same time.

4. Who should pay for the author identifier system?

- Journal Publisher
- Blogger
- Database maintainer
- Author
- Other:

Those that gain the most from the author identifier system should pay for it. But because I think that quick adoption of the system is important, I wouldn't make authors pay.

5. Should author identifiers be managed by a central organization?

- Yes
- No

I think yes, and for the reasons that Geoffrey Bilder explained in the interview with me. In my opinion a distributed system would create too many new problems.

6. Which organization should manage author identifiers?

- CrossRef
- U.S. National Library of Medicine
- Other:

The main reason that many people are reluctant to have author identifiers managed by a single institution is that they don't want a single publisher

or other commercial entity to control this system. But both CrossRef and the National Library of Medicine have a good track record for implementing publishing standards. I would prefer Crossref, as the National Library of Medicine is only concerned with a subset of papers, i.e. the biomedical literature.

7. Should an author identifier system for scientists be based on OpenID?

- Yes
- No

I would say no. OpenID is a distributed system, which is not desirable as discussed in questions #5 and #10. And OpenID also handles authentication, something which isn't necessarily required (as discussed in question #1).

8. Should there be one or several author identifier systems?

- One
- Several
- Several with one top system

Similar to the DOI, I want only one unique author identifier. But this one unique identifier can then be linked to several other systems, e.g. an OpenID for authentication or a Nature Network, LinkedIn or Mendeley profile to list all your papers and other contributions.

I hope that enough people also answer these questions in the poll I posted.