ResearcherID: Interview with Renny Guida

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Open Researcher and Contributor ID or ORCID is a community effort to standardize researcher identification. The initiative was first announced last December, and is supported by a growing number of publishers, scholarly societies and academic institutions. Thomson Reuters is not only one of the founding members of the initiative, but will also provide the ResearcherID technology as a starting point for building the ORCID platform.

I asked Renny Guida from Thomson Reuters a few questions about his thoughts on unique author identifiers in general, and ResearcherID and ORCID in particular.

Members of the ResearcherID team (from left to right): Renny Guida, Ellen Rotenberg, Chiu Chung and Deepak Chaturvedi.

1. What is ResearcherID?

ResearcherID is a freely available system that helps the research community overcome the issues of individual name ambiguity and attribution. The system is available to everyone and allows a researcher to establish, maintain and control a biographic and bibliographic profile.

The system is the result of research that found that individual identity touches many parts of scholarly communications and that researcher's and academic institutions were ready to take some ownership of the issue to ensure proper attribution of scholarship.

The Registry is composed of biographical and bibliographic components which are accessible at the researcherid.com web site. A web services API makes it possible for an institution or organization to create and use this information in their systems.

The biographical component of the registry creates a unique identifier and persistent web location for each user. The system is designed to allow a researcher to control privacy and access to the information in their profile, even if the information was uploaded by the researcher's institution. Researchers can enter and manage information about themselves, their work and their affiliations (example record).

The bibliographic component of ResearcherID allows researchers to connect articles, patents and other scholarly items to their profile. Items can be loaded from EndNote, the Web of Science or in a text format into one of three lists.

As I mentioned, a web service makes it possible for organizations to create and manage both biographic and bibliographic information for their faculty and researchers. Upload, download and search services make this possible. For example, David Palmer at the University of Hong Kong uses ResearcherID to create identifiers for HKU researchers.

2. What is ORCID, and how does it relate to ResearcherID?

Open Researcher Contributor ID (ORCID) is an initiative to better understand how the issue of individual name ambiguity can be solved. Currently a cross section of the research community is discussing ways to overcome the issue with the hopes of establishing an open registry that will be used by the global research community.

One of the lessons learned from Thomson Reuters' development of ResearcherID is that issues of name ambiguity and attribution are problems bigger than any one organization can address. And, having multiple solutions to the problem will not meet the needs of researchers or the scholarly community. Based on ResearcherID's innovation and success in addressing these issues, Thomson Reuters plans to offer ORCID the technology and infrastructure for managing the biographic registry.

The initiative has grown from early 2009 conversations between Thomson Reuters and Nature Publishing Group into a global collaboration of academic institutions, research centers, funding agencies, scholarly societies and publishers. To date, everyone involved in the effort is volunteering their time and work is focused on the business and technical implications of creating an independent organization to manage an identity registry system. More information on the initiative can be found at the ORCID web site.

3.There are numerous other initiatives for unique researcher identifiers. What is unique about ResearcherID?

What is unique about ResearcherID is that it is a global initiative and not focused on any one organization, consortia, country or application. The system also ensures privacy and allows researchers to control their information. The ResearcherID is portable and can be included in authored works and used as a dynamic link on the researcher's website.

4. How does ResearcherID integrate with other Thomson Reuters products and outside tools?

The system was designed to allow all users, independent of any Thomson Reuters subscriptions, to benefit from the application. All users have the ability to

establish an identifier, create and manage a biographical profile, and manage a list of scholarly works.

The ResearcherID system is closely coupled with EndNote and by May 2010, all ResearcherID users, independent of any Thomson Reuters subscriptions, will have access to the web version of EndNote.

For users having access to the Web of Knowledge there are a number of additional integration points:

- Researchers can claim items from the Web of Science by either performing a search or using the Distinct Author Sets feature that automatically clusters articles believed to be authored by the same person.
- Researchers can claim items from any Web of Knowledge database.
- The ResearcherID system uses the Web of Science to automatically update the ResearcherID system with the times cited count.
- Web of Science times cited information is used to generate personal citation reports and the citation visualizations (currently being tested in ResearcherID labs environment) to visualize collaboration and citation networks.

5. Do you plan to continue with ResearcherID once ORCID is fully working?

Our plans are to adapt and enhance ResearcherID to support ORCID and allow users access to personal citation functionality and services on our Web of Knowledge platform. Thomson Reuters is one of the catalysts of the ORCID initiative and is working with our colleagues to help ORCID succeed. We will fully support ORCID from the enhanced ResearcherID platform and other Thomson Reuters applications.

6. What would be the benefits of using a unique author identifier for a researcher?

The unique author identifier not only addresses the issues of name ambiguity and attribution but benefits the scholarly communication process by maintaining the link between the researchers and their scholarship. This link is critical given the proliferation of information available on the Web and the demand to find information in less time and with greater accuracy.

The real benefit comes when all involved in the scholarly communications can leveraged the identifier to improve the process. Easier tenure review, better assessment of research output, more intelligent discovery tools, enhanced peer review systems and tools to maintain scholarly networks are some of the benefits of using a unique author identifier.

7. Where do you see the biggest obstacles in launching a universally accepted unique identifier for researchers? Technical or social?

I see two large obstacles. The first, and I believe most important, is the researchers perception of security and ownership. The system must allow researchers to control and manage their data.

The second biggest obstacle is the sustainability of an organization that would provide the identity service. ORCID is proving that the community can work together to address the technicalities of a global identity system. And, while there are significant technical, privacy and other challenges, the initiative is making great progress. However, such a service requires resources and the system must be supported financially by the community.

8. What is your thinking with regards to automatically assigning unique author identifiers to papers vs. authors claiming their publications?

I see these as being two complementary and important services. Algorithmic clustering of papers is a common feature in many applications including the Web of Science and other bibliographic databases. For the most part, these clustering systems do a good job identifying a high percentage of papers for a particular author. However, because none of the industry's algorithms are perfect, a claiming system that enables the researcher to associate all of their papers is an ideal complement and helps to complete a career profile of a researcher's works.

9. What are your responsibilities at Thomson Reuters?

My title is Director of eResearch Services. Some of my responsibilities include individual identity initiatives (ResearcherID and the Web of Science Distinct Author Sets clustering system), Web of Knowledge web services, inbound and outbound linking, current awareness and alerting systems, and COUNTER compliant usage reporting systems.

10. What did you do before working at Thomson Reuters?

Prior to joining Thomson Reuters in 1997 I worked for the Datapro division of McGraw Hill in product development and for Xerox selling document management systems.