

Business Models

One of the most frequent questions that comes up in my editorial duties has to do with the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME) journals' page number limits, page charges, cost of downloads, and access for nonsubscribers. Beyond the journal per se, we often discuss the ever-rising conference costs. What then is the Society's business model behind such limits and charges? And should we be thinking of a different model that may be more pertinent to current and future needs of the community?

I will offer my personal take on this and present some of the issues involved, in hope you may have your own insights and ideas to communicate to me as we move forward. I am not cognizant of an official ASME business model per se, and I would be pleased to present new ideas to the ASME senior management as these surface through our community—you.

Most readers would agree that we no longer need journal paper print copies; therefore, one may think there should be no cost to publishing a paper. But publishing has expenses, even without paper print issues. Even though the vast majority of the publication enterprise is based on volunteers (editors and reviewers), staff help is still needed to support the manuscript processing. Most of the staff work is actually trying to get authors (and occasionally editors) to provide their manuscript in the best possible form and in a timely manner. There are also production costs such as typesetting, copy editing, publicity, and so on. Significant language style and usage corrections are left to the volunteers (reviewers and editors), with the attendant burden to the required reviewing effort.

So here come the page charges. ASME used to have a six-page limit to free publication of papers. With time this increased to nine pages. For the *Journal of Mechanical Design* (JMD), I have gradually started asking for waivers of page charges for papers up to 12 pages and so far I have been successful in getting ASME publications to approve them. If all full-length papers were 12 pages, we would need over 30% increase in the page allocation to the journal. So how should we cover the additional costs? ASME is receptive to making changes to the page charge policy, but we all need to think how this can be done equitably.

Actually, we do have a mechanism to address paper length through a supplementary publication service offered by ASME, as I had noted in a previous editorial (see http://asmejmd.org/show_editorial.php). I have received exactly two author inquiries about this service over the past 18 months. A good number of page waiver requests were made during that same time. So this supplementary service does not appear to be a solution.

Next come the download charges. If I am not a subscriber to JMD, I can read an article's abstract for free, but a pdf of an

article costs \$25 to obtain from the ASME Digital Library via the Scitation service (<http://asmedl.aip.org/MechanicalDesign/>). That is a bit steep. Most academics in the U.S. have subscriptions through their institutions, but most industry readers and many non-U.S. academics do not. Although possible, it is generally a hassle for them to get such purchasing approvals. Not infrequently, I have to send copies of references cited in an assigned-for-review manuscript to (non-U.S.-based academic) associate editors or reviewers so they can do a fair reviewing job. This is not quite a desirable state of affairs. More institutions need to acquire institutional subscriptions for their researchers—which usually mean that the researchers themselves must request it from their institutional librarians.

ASME is a nonprofit organization. How does it support its enterprise? ASME collects fees, for example, for memberships, journal subscriptions, conferences, and short courses attendance and uses the balance after costs to support its activities. If we want open access and fewer or no page charges, and assuming we have a generally efficient organization, then we need to look for some other sources of revenue or in any case some different business model. For example, how should I respond to authors who do not subscribe to the journal, who are not ASME members, and who request (multiple) page charge waivers? Should we expect all authors to be ASME members or JMD subscribers in exchange for open access to all? What about our industry colleagues? Institutional subscriptions are not that common, so some form of discounted or near-free access policy is needed. I do not know what business cases can be made for such policies, but these are examples of ideas I would be eager to hear from the JMD community and bring to the ASME management. My experience is that well-conceived ideas put forth by our community are very likely to be adopted by ASME.

I must confess that I always suspect long papers as harboring an extra dose of ZISs (see May 2009 Editorial, <http://asmejmd.org/editorials.php>) and those papers can be too long even if they are less than nine pages. Still, I am willing to fight for our authors' right to publish their high quality papers without artificial restrictions and high costs for them to write and for us to read them. We need different business models and ideas how to make this happen. I welcome your ideas and suggestions via email to editor@asmejmd.org.

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