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## The Economics of Open Access

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# THE ECONOMICS OF OPEN ACCESS

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Year one for *Communications in Information Literacy* (CIL) is in the books. We can say this literally; the print version of Volume One is now available through the online print-on-demand service Lulu (<http://www.lulu.com>). When co-editor Stewart Brower and I announced this, we received a number of email messages concerning our distribution method, and in general, our open-access economic model. One note came from Susan Searing, suggesting that "the welter of publishing and commerce models out there is making life very difficult for selectors and acquisitions librarians." She continued, "You've just added another strange twist—annual volumes that have to be ordered like books." Searing concluded her message by proposing that we revisit other revenue-generating economic models commonly adopted by open-access publications: advertising, institutional sponsorship, and author fees.

We wish to assure our readership that a substantial amount of research and deliberation went into the development of our economic model, which includes the provision of our print-on-demand service. As Stewart is fond of saying, we adopted the "PBS model" (plead, beg and steal), and we did so for a number of reasons. To begin with, CIL's present financial needs are minimal. The modest income

generated from Lulu serves us very well, particularly for Web hosting fees. CIL is a not-for-profit enterprise; our sole purpose is the dissemination of scholarly information, and our primary vehicle is open access. Thus, in another strange twist, CIL offers a print-on-demand service in support of its nature as an open-access journal.

Concerns about making the distribution of our print volumes more library-friendly are valid and understandable. However, we believe this is more of an issue for subscription vendors and book jobbers than it is for publishers. Stewart and I believe that the future of paper-based publishing is print-on-demand: It is more efficient, there is better return on investment, and it is better for the environment. As a matter of viability, subscription vendors and book jobbers will need to devise mechanisms for working with print-on-demand services en masse, rather than title by title. We see this beginning to happen already: Ingram Wholesalers has teamed up with Lightning Source, and Lulu has partnered with R.R. Bowker to purchase ISBNs, as well as to list titles in Books in Print. For an additional fee, Lulu also lists with online booksellers such as Amazon.com and BN.com, Barnes & Noble's online storefront. That said, our distribution model—like the journal itself—will continue to

evolve. Although standing orders are not currently an option, we are developing an invoice-driven distribution system through the CIL site. Stay tuned.

This brings us back to the issue of economics. Our print-on-demand service generates modest, but necessary income. In keeping with the "PBS model," CIL also accepts donations by check or by PayPal. We considered author fees, but not for long. Stewart is more diplomatic in his explanation; he believes this model discourages first-time authors or any others who lack financial backing. I believe it reflects badly on any publisher that stipulates author fees, and I believe the practice is regressive at best. In terms of advertising or institutional sponsorship, Stewart and I have been in agreement from day one: CIL is and will continue to be independently published, with no possible affiliation that would in any way have any impact on the integrity of the journal and what it represents.

We understand that many of CIL's operations break from tradition, and that this requires selectors and acquisitions librarians to make adjustments. The same can be said for our readers and our contributors. As I said in my editorial for the inaugural issue of CIL, "We believe that a new path of scholarly communication is presently being established by new ideas, innovative technologies, and creative publishing models." This is the philosophy behind our ever-evolving operations. We wish to distinguish CIL, but it is not our intent to be different simply for the sake of being different. We intend to distinguish CIL as a first-rate professional journal dedicated to issues of information literacy, and we desire to do so by embracing what we regard as a new paradigm for scholarly communication. As ever, we remain sensitive to the needs of our users and vigilant about the future of the CIL enterprise.

*Communications in Information Literacy* publishes invited editorial content, including reviews of books and other media, interviews with select figures in the information literacy community, and guest editorial and opinion.

If you are interested in contributing editorial content to the journal, please inquire with the Editors ([editors@comminfolit.org](mailto:editors@comminfolit.org)).