Historical Price Trends
This season is often a time of reflection on the year winding down. Looking back, what has had the greatest impact on our industry this year? For many in our industry, the topic dominating boardroom discussions in 2010 was the same as 2009: budget challenges.

In a world of changing technology and more demanding content delivery expectations, the current economic climate brought to society publishers unprecedented budget challenges—challenges intensified by constricted institutional funding that left librarians across all segments fighting to salvage what they could of their budgets while searching for ways to reduce costs. How did the economic downturn impact journal subscription prices?

To follow is a summary of price trends from a group of approximately 250 publications appearing in the Allen Press Buyer’s Guide to Scientific, Medical, and Scholarly Journals™.

Since 1989, prices for US society journals have increased, on average, 7.3% annually. For each of the past three years, average price increases for US-based journals have hovered around 6%, more than a full percentage point lower than the historical average (Fig 1).

The average price increase of non–US-based journals was slightly lower than US-based titles in 2010, but more than 2% higher in 2011. Since 2009, the average annual increase of non–US-based journals was nearly a full percentage point higher than US-based journals (Table 1).

Most of the titles in the study are peer-reviewed journals. Average prices of peer-reviewed titles increased by an annual average of 6.5% from 2009 to 2011. The average prices of non–peer-reviewed journals have actually decreased since 2009 (Table 2).
Price increases varied depending on the format of the content. Between 2009 and 2011, the most significant price increases were titles offered in a print plus online format. While there has been fluctuation year to year, average prices for online-only titles have decreased since 2009. Prices for print-only titles have remained flat since 2009 (Table 4).

Reviewing trends regarding average subscription prices is helpful in understanding how publishers responded to recent economic challenges, but consider the following. During 2008 and 2009, more than 60% of print-only titles and titles distributed in both print and online formats raised subscription prices by more than 5% per year (Fig 2). Over the course of 2010 and 2011, however, less than 30% of print-only and less than 50% of print plus online delivery journals increased prices by more than 5% per year. Also worth noting is that during 2010 and 2011 nearly 60% of the print-only titles kept prices the same as 2009 (Fig 3).

With regard to online-only publications, 42% increased prices by more than 5% per year during 2010 and 2011 (Fig 3). By comparison, only 32% of online-only titles raised prices by more than 5% per year in 2008 and 2009 (Fig 2).

In summary, annual journal price increases over the past three years have been lower than historical averages. During this period, the average annual increase for US-based journals was lower than for international titles. In addition, there was a notable upward shift in the number of publishers moderating or holding the line on journal prices.

With the exception of Agriculture and Engineering titles, average prices in all subject categories increased or remained nearly the same between 2009 and 2011. Chemistry and Technology titles continued to be the highest priced of all journals in the study. History, Philosophy and Religion, and Education titles were the least expensive (Table 3).

**Figure 1** Annual US journal price increases compared to Consumer Price Index (CPI). Sources: Annual price changes for US journals are from annual Allen Press studies. CPI is from the US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.
Current Situation
Librarians have long voiced concerns that publisher subscription prices increasing faster than the rate of inflation hinder their ability to maintain library collections. These concerns escalated in early 2009 when the International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC) released a statement regarding the global economic crisis. The ICOLC statement predicted “significant and widespread” budget cuts for libraries and consortia, “reductions unlike the sporadic or regional episodes experienced from year to year.” The ICOLC advised that annual double-digit cuts would not be uncommon, and that reductions would be prolonged. “Once funding is withdrawn over multiple years, it will be years before budgets climb back toward pre-crisis levels.”

Shortly after the ICOLC published its concerns, the Association of Research Librarians (ARL) followed with a similar statement. According to the ARL, “Most institutions that in the past have been able to protect collections expenditures with special monies or compensatory increases in cuts to other portions of their budget have reached a point where this is no longer a responsible strategy. Instead, institutions are planning for permanent reductions in both staff and collections resources.” The ARL statement requested publishers to seek ways to reduce subscription prices to avoid cancellations.

In April 2010 the American Library Association (ALA) released “The State of America’s Libraries.” It reported that a decade-long trend of increasing library use is continuing—and even accelerating during economic hard times. While library use increased, a majority of states reported cuts in state funding to public libraries and to agencies that support statewide library programs.

“In an effort to cut costs and consolidate services, many research universities have closed small special branch libraries. The University of Washington closed several libraries early in the year. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology closed two special science branches. The University of Iowa announced that closing its mathematics, psychology, geoscience, and physics libraries would save about $1 million a year. And the University of California at Los Angeles was considering closing its art library.”

Other cost-cutting measures have included postponing/canceling capital projects, eliminating staff through attrition, using

Table 1 Average price increase of US vs. non-US journals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Average Annual Change 09–11</th>
<th>% Change 10–11</th>
<th>% Change 09–10</th>
<th>2011 Average Price</th>
<th>2010 Average Price</th>
<th>2009 Average Price</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Titles</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>$755.85</td>
<td>$711.33</td>
<td>$671.85</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>$653.39</td>
<td>$618.59</td>
<td>$583.48</td>
<td>82.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-US</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>$1,223.90</td>
<td>$1,134.97</td>
<td>$1,075.55</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 Average price increase peer reviewed vs. not peer reviewed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average Annual Change 09–11</th>
<th>% Change 10–11</th>
<th>% Change 09–10</th>
<th>2011 Average Price</th>
<th>2010 Average Price</th>
<th>2009 Average Price</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer Reviewed</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>$792.77</td>
<td>$742.66</td>
<td>$701.10</td>
<td>92.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Peer Reviewed</td>
<td>-5.6%</td>
<td>-8.2%</td>
<td>-3.2%</td>
<td>$290.23</td>
<td>$316.15</td>
<td>$326.74</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
volunteer and student workers, cross-training employees, and canceling subscriptions.

**Journal Cancellations**

From its 2010 survey of academic libraries in North America, The Primary Research Group reported that research universities experienced significant decreases in materials expenditures in 2009–2010 compared to 2008–2009, with overall library reductions averaging 4% and subject-specific libraries experiencing 19% drops.4

Evidence of significant institutional subscription cancellations was found at the following universities:

**Georgia Tech University** In the spring of 2010, the Georgia Tech Library announced cancellation of 678 journal subscriptions, which resulted in an anticipated $320,000 savings for 2010.5

**University of Washington** Effective January 1, 2010, access to an estimated 2,800 journals and other individual and bundled subscriptions was canceled, resulting in an estimated savings of $1.5 million. Over 1,200 print subscriptions duplicating electronic subscriptions were canceled.6

**Washington State University** In 2010 WSU Libraries completely canceled 182 individual subscriptions, resulting in cost savings of approximately $141,000. In addition, 154 individual print subscriptions were canceled (online subscriptions were kept or added), which yielded an estimated $22,000 in cost savings. Most notably, 1,324 titles in publisher bundles were discontinued as a result of package cancellations and renegotiations.7

**University of California, San Francisco** Part of the University of California Library System, UCSF is experiencing significant budget cuts that, in 2010, resulted in cancellation of 118 print titles and 115 online titles. Additional cost-cutting measures employed by UCSF included reduction of library hours and cancellation of databases with low usage.8

**Oregon State University** For 2010, a total of 491 titles were marked for cancellation. Of these titles, 314 were print only, 165 online only, and 12 were print and online subscriptions.9

**University of Nevada, Las Vegas** The 2010 goal for the University of Nevada, Las Vegas Libraries was to save $400,000 through the cancellation of journal and database subscriptions in addition to other recurring commitments.10

**Wellesley College** Wellesley College is reviewing the library’s journal subscriptions in anticipation of a $200,000 (approximately 9%) budget reduction for FY11. Of the 335 titles selected for
cancellation, 218 were print subscriptions while the remaining 117 were online subscriptions.11

**Binghamton University**  Binghamton University Libraries was able to avoid journal cancellations in 2008–2009, in part through salary savings of vacant staff positions. However, the 2009–2010 department budget was cut by an additional $320,000. The budget called for $100,000 of the shortfall to come through journal subscription cancellations and elimination of vacant staff positions.13

**University of Wisconsin, Madison**  During 2008–2009 the UW-Madison Libraries began downsizing by reducing the number of staff, service points, and print collections. The General Library System (GLS) implemented a 1% base budget reduction for 2009–2010.13 Reductions to their acquisitions budget were achieved through converting 768 subscriptions to online-only access and canceling 515 serials. For 2011 the University is considering cancellation of 680 serials and converting 42 others to online access only.14

**New Mexico State University**  Due to statewide budgetary shortfalls, the NMSU Library is facing a $575,000 (27%) cut to its materials budget. As a result, the library is canceling nearly 723 serial subscriptions in 2011.15 In addition, during the past two years the library has moved 229 titles to electronic only. At the present time a little over half of its serials subscriptions are electronic only. The library expects to continue migration to online-only subscriptions in years to come.16

**Cancellation Criteria**  Each university used different criteria and considered different factors to decide which titles to cancel. In reviewing factors used in some of these cancellation decisions, a few common themes emerged:

1. Elimination of subscription duplications was typical.
2. Institutions sought ways to understand and measure usage.
3. The “Big Deals” received significant scrutiny.
4. Use of interlibrary loans is on the rise.

**Elimination of Duplications**  As was the case in 2009, elimination of subscription duplications

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**Table 4**  Average price increase of print vs online (based on format reported for 2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Average Annual Change 09–11</th>
<th>% Change 10–11</th>
<th>% Change 09–10</th>
<th>2011 Average Price</th>
<th>2010 Average Price</th>
<th>2009 Average Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Print-Only Format</td>
<td>-0.1%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>-1.9%</td>
<td>$279.99</td>
<td>$274.94</td>
<td>$280.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online-Only Format</td>
<td>-2.8%</td>
<td>-14.5%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>$774.22</td>
<td>$905.44</td>
<td>$819.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both Print and Online</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>$945.80</td>
<td>$864.60</td>
<td>$812.49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
was a priority for a number of library budget managers. In the face of unprecedented budget cuts, librarians examined aggregator purchases and sought ways to eliminate duplications resulting from overlapping subscriptions. In addition, librarians grappling with the challenges of managing content in multiple formats faced difficult decisions regarding which formats to keep. For most institutions, it appears the online format was generally selected over print. Examples of institutions seeking to eliminate subscription duplication include the following:

The 1,200 print subscriptions canceled at the University of Washington came as a direct result of their efforts to eliminate subscription duplications.6

The 118 print subscriptions canceled at the University of California, San Francisco were titles that are also accessible online.17

Goals of the 2010 restructuring at the University of Wisconsin, Madison included elimination of duplicate collections and formats, and having fewer circulating collections.13

Accelerated by the budget crisis, calls for publishers to switch to electronic formats gained momentum. For some in the academic community, the question is whether a rapid transition could result in unintended consequences.

In an interview with Publishing Consultant John B. McHugh, Katina Strauch, editor and publisher of Against the Grain, notes, “It’s a no brainer that ‘just in time’ is the approach of necessity in times when budgets are stretched. And there are many, many, many more products to purchase (lease is the operative word now) than there were in 1980 when I became an acquisitions librarian.”18

Strauch asks, “How will decisions that we are making now in 2010 be perceived by those who follow us in 2075 or 2110? We are doing our best to digitize hidden collections in our special collections departments. At the same time we are discarding print in place of electronic on all fronts. And most of us have no real plans to preserve the electronic content that we are leasing. I am not so much saying that this is wrong as I am saying that we ought to be talking more intently about this and thinking about it collectively as a profession.”18

Strauch isn’t alone in her concerns regarding content preservation. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 35% of academic libraries currently have active digitization projects. In addition, The Chronicle of Higher Education reported in November 2009 that the Mellon Foundation awarded a planning grant to a West Coast academic library consortium to explore the idea of a “shared print repository infrastructure” serving the western United States. A Mellon Foundation grant was also awarded to Cornell University for a partnership in collaborative collection development, acquisitions, and processing designed to improve quality and eliminate redundancies.3

As the library e-transition accelerates, there is no doubt that library Information Technology (IT) resources are being used now more than ever. Librarians at some institutions have expressed quiet concern that a deluge of additional data management demands could overwhelm already stretched thin IT resources.
challenge ahead for these libraries is managing the additional electronic data management demands with no additional funding and no additional staff.

The discontinuation of library print subscriptions is not news to society executives. Society publishers reported this past year that subscriptions are generally down, especially print. A review of approximately 250 journals printed at Allen Press also confirmed this report, as erosion of press runs in 2010 was indeed more significant than in 2009.

While institutional print subscriptions and press runs are generally declining, it doesn’t appear as though publishers are ready to abandon print distribution. Of the titles in the Allen Press Buyer’s Guide to Scientific, Medical, and Scholarly Journals™ historical price trends study, publications historically distributed in print are increasingly adding online delivery options while the number of journals circulated in an online-only format has remained virtually unchanged during the past four years. While some publishers are actively exploring secondary online-only publications or limited print models, few have completely converted their primary publications to online-only availability (Fig 4). More and more, publishers are increasing the price of the print at a higher rate than the online version to drive decisions and behavior of subscribers.

**Increased Efforts to Measure Usage**—From 2010 cancellations it is clear that many universities sought ways to understand usage and develop some sort of benchmark system. For example:

The University of Washington considered faculty and student input along with cost, usage, and citation statistics to determine which cancellations would save the most money but be the least disruptive to research, clinical care, and teaching.6

Cancellation criteria considered by Washington State University included: the number of papers in the journal authored by WSU staff in the three prior years, number of WSU papers cited in the journal in the three prior years, and download statistics.7

UCSF (University of California, San Francisco) as part of the University of California (UC) Library System decided which print titles to cancel based on a three-month study of journal use. In considering online titles to cut in 2010, the goal was to eliminate titles with the lowest value and least impact on UCSF and UC, while preserving the highest quality titles as well as titles serving unique campus needs for faculty, staff, and students. Factors considered in the review process included subscription cost, UC-wide and campus-specific usage, cost-per-use, impact factor, relative cost index, and an overall weighted value based on the UC subscription. As part of the process, all UC campus libraries reviewed and voted on the titles to be cut.8

A number of factors were considered in cancellation decisions at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.10 Among those:

- Use of the journal, especially the most recent issues (last 3 years)
- The number of times since 2002 UNLV authors have cited (as well as published in) collection publications
- Faculty and student feedback

Wellesley College library staff specifically targeted low-use journals (fewer than five uses per year, averaged over three years) and those with a high cost-per-use (over $100 per use).11

**Focus on the Big Deals**—Publisher bundles continue to be a source of frustration for a number of institutional librarians in their fight to manage collections costs and minimize cancellation of journals core to their collection. For example:

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**Figure 4** Shift in format

[Graph showing the shift in format]
While cancellations were significant at Georgia Tech, the University noted that they were unable to cancel some Elsevier, Springer, and Wiley subscriptions as they are under contract prohibiting cancellation.\(^{19}\)

According to the University of Washington, “Reducing subscriptions to some publishers’ journals has been especially challenging, because many journals are ‘bundled’ in a way that makes it impossible to cancel them without sacrificing access to dozens or even hundreds of others. Such sobering losses have unfortunately become a reality, as access to some 1,200 titles from prominent science journal publisher Springer will be lost because the UW and other libraries in the region that shared the group contract lack the funding to maintain it.”\(^{6}\)

As part of its ongoing process, the University of California Libraries reviews journal subscription packages throughout the UC system as they come up for renewal. Typically these packages are negotiated for 3–5 years. This year, the University of California, San Francisco, along with UC reviewed journal packages published by Springer, SAGE, and Nature Publishing Group. In June UC Libraries proposed a boycott of Nature Publishing Group as a result of what it perceived to be a 300% price increase beginning in 2011. A joint statement was later released indicating that both parties would work together to explore “potential new approaches and evolving publishing models” to avoid the boycott.\(^{17}\)

At New Mexico State University, subscriptions to over 1,300 Springer and Elsevier/Academic Press journals were canceled. “In order to make the necessary cancellations, multi-year and consortial packages with these publishers were discontinued.”\(^{15}\)

Increased Reliance on Interlibrary Loan—As library budgets were stretched to their limits, librarians turned to interlibrary loan services for relief. For some libraries the availability of title access through interlibrary loans was a consideration in the cancellation decision process. At Georgia Tech University, whenever possible the library canceled only journals in paper form. Students could request other canceled titles through interlibrary loan.\(^{5}\) The University of Washington noted that journal articles unavailable within the university library system could generally be provided through interlibrary loan as well.\(^{6}\) For the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, one factor in cancellation decisions was whether articles could be obtained quickly and inexpensively through interlibrary loan or by other means.\(^{10}\) Meanwhile, Wellesley library staff specifically targeted journals with a high cost-per-use (over $100 per use) that could be accessed more cost-effectively through interlibrary loan services.\(^{11}\) Washington State University dropped interlibrary loan fees. “As our subscriptions have decreased we have necessarily forced users into interlibrary loan to fill even their primary research needs.”\(^{7}\)

Other Factors—In most of the cancellation decisions, it appeared that library staff requested and considered faculty and student input. In addition, at the University of New Mexico special consideration was given based on the title’s uniqueness and programmatic importance.\(^{20}\) Usage data notwithstanding, Wellesley gave additional consideration to journals supporting courses taught every two or three years for which there is no other online access and titles with high-quality images that are not available in other sources.\(^{11}\)

Summary of Cancellation Decisions—Three things were clear regarding 2010 journal cancellations:

1. In spite of warnings from some corners of dire consequences of cancellation for publishers raising prices, in most cases price (or a price increase) was not the primary factor in deciding which journals to cancel.
Prices were, however, often part of the evaluation process as was the case at institutions such as Oregon State University and others that expressly factored into cancellation decisions the journals’ price history and whether their prices were regularly inflated above average. In addition, a number of other libraries established cost-per-use benchmarks that were considered in cancellation decisions.

While there were exceptions such as the University of California’s threatened boycott of Nature Publishing Group, generally decisions to cancel were based on factors other than just price increases.

2. In making cancellation decisions, it appears that aside from improving library efficiency (through eliminating duplications, switching to electronic formats, and maximizing use of interlibrary loan services), the primary objective at most institutions was to assure that the retained subscriptions provided maximum value to the institutions’ students and faculty.

3. Information from 2010 cancellations suggests that commercial publisher subscription bundles were and likely will continue to be scrutinized for potential cost reductions.

Open Access
Debate surrounding open access continued throughout 2010. On July 29, 2010, the Information Policy, Census and National Archives Subcommittee of the House Committee on Government Oversight and Reform held a hearing on the issue of public access to federally funded research. The subcommittee invited several witnesses, representing a broad cross section of the stakeholders, to testify on the implications of opening access to the results of publicly funded research. The subcommittee’s chair, Rep. William Lacy Clay Jr., Democrat of Missouri, noted that the proceedings were not attached to any specific piece of legislation but were designed “to examine the current state of federally funded research and to discuss the potential implications of increased access.”

With or without legislation, barriers to open access still exist. Some may prove more formidable than others. Katina Strauch noted, “Librarians like open access. They think all information should be free. This is a worthy Utopian concept but it is unrealistic. In the world as we are living now, someone or something has to pay to produce and keep/store information.”

Last year’s announcement of the Compact for Open Access Publishing Equity—a joint agreement among Harvard University, Cornell University, Dartmouth University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the University of California, Berkeley, and others—clearly demonstrates increasing institutional commitment to funding open access research. This commitment is a positive initial step for addressing open access funding. One thing not immediately clear, however, is the degree of publishing and content storage assistance institutions with open access initiatives will require from existing resources in their library systems—departments with limited information technology resources facing mounting funding challenges that, in some cases, are already inundated with electronic content management demands.

Faculty attitudes may also prove to be a challenge for moving open access forward. In April 2010, ITHAKA published “Key Strategic Insights for Libraries, Publishers and Societies.” ITHAKA’s insights were obtained through a survey of more than 3,000 faculty from institutions of all sizes, representing Humanities, Social Sciences, Sciences, Area Studies, and other disciplines.

Authors Roger Schonfeld and Ross Housewright concluded that fundamentally conservative faculty attitudes regarding scholarly communications will handicap systematic change to traditional publishing models. “Other factors apply, but a broad circulation among a faculty member’s own peers is the ultimate motivating
“Many libraries faced stagnant or reduced operating and materials budgets for the 2009–10 fiscal year, and the near future will likely bring additional budget pressures.”

The ITHAKA report casts doubt that, at least in the near term, open access journals funded by author fees will be embraced. “In addition to reputational concerns about the visibility of their work product to their peers, faculty prioritize paying nothing to publish their own articles over the openness of the resulting article, suggesting that the ‘author-pays’ model favored by many open access journals may not match the preferences of many faculty.”

Looking Ahead to 2011
State and library budgets are not expected to improve much in 2011. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, even after making deep cuts, states continue to face large budget gaps. The center’s initial assessment is that 2011 budget shortfalls will be as big as or bigger than those in 2010. States will, for a number of years, continue to struggle to find revenue sufficient to fund critical public services.

The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) offers a similar assessment. The ACRL reported, “Many libraries faced stagnant or reduced operating and materials budgets for the 2009–10 fiscal year, and the near future will likely bring additional budget pressures.” The ACRL reported that poor performing endowments, which according to The Chronicle of Higher Education returned 18.7%, were the worst since 1974.

Federal support is also a concern as federal stimulus funds for education are running out. According to the ACRL, even after the economy improves, state revenues are likely to lag in their recovery by at least two years.

Current indications are that for 2011, a number of publishers have frozen prices at 2010 levels, reduced the percent increase from prior year, or restructured pricing. For example:

The Medical Library Association (MLA) The MLA assembled a list of publishers that have frozen 2011 prices at 2010 levels and/or are offering libraries additional price options. Publishers in the MLA list include:

- American Dental Education Association
- American Diabetes Association
- American Foundation for the Blind
- American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology
- American Society of Clinical Oncology
- American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists
- American Society of Limnology and Oceanography
- American Speech Language-Hearing Association
- American Veterinary Medical Association
- Annals Publishing Company
- Berkeley Electronic Press
- Ecological Society of America
- Edinburgh University Press
- Gallaudet University Press
- Global Science Press Ltd.
- GMP Trends, Inc.
- Institute of Physics
Institution of Engineering and Technology
International Institute of Anticancer Research
Journal of Rheumatology Publishing Company
The Medical Letter, Inc.
MIT Press
National Academy of Sciences
National Association for Practical Nurse Education and Service, Inc.
National Council of Teachers of Mathematics
New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
Oncology Nursing Society
Royal Society Publishing
Sociedad Española de Histología e Ingeniería Tisular
Society for Science and the Public

*The Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE)* There will be a price freeze for 2011 on the ICE Complete Journals Collection.26

*De Gruyter* For 2011, there will be no increase in US prices.27

*The Institution of Mechanical Engineers (IMechE)* 2011 E-Only subscription price for all IMechE journals will remain at 2010 levels.28

*MIT Press Journals* 2011 prices resulted in an average price increase of 2.5% from 2010.29

*BioScientifica* Price increases in 2011 for online subscriptions to all journals will be 3%.30

*Nature Publishing Group (NPG)* In August 2010, the NPG announced that the *list price* of NPG-owned titles would increase 4.5% in 2011. In his annual letter, NPG’s Managing Director Steven Inchcoombe indicated that list prices for society journals are set independently in consultation with individual societies.31

**Ideas For 2011**
As we close the book on 2010, here are a few ideas to consider in 2011.

**Offer Creative Price Structures and Incentives**
For some publishers, the approach for setting next year’s subscription prices is simply a matter of determining the percentage to increase (or perhaps decrease) from the prior year. Last year we saw more publishers using subscription prices (or percentage changes) as incentives to steer subscribers toward a specific course of action. Examples include:

- **IMechE** – While IMechE held 2011 electronic subscription prices at 2010 levels, a 2011 combined print and online subscription will increase by 6%.28
- **BioScientifica** – Subscription prices for online BioScientifica journals will increase by 3% in 2011. Customers desiring a print journal will pay a premium of 20% on the online price.30

Whether intended or not, in both of these cases the subscription price structure served as an incentive to purchase one format over another.

Another price approach was designed not so much to steer customers toward a specific format as to head off potential subscription cancellations during current economic instability. To illustrate:
“Increasing the number of high-quality articles per issue can be a way of adding value to the publication and maximizing subscriptions.”

BioScientifica offered a price freeze through 2013 for customers who commit to maintaining individual subscriptions for this entire period.30 Publishers are also starting to experiment with pay-per-view options for institutions wishing to move to a user-driven acquisition model whereby users select which articles they want to access as opposed to the library purchasing a subscription to an entire collection.

In his paper, “Forcing the Moment to Its Crisis: Thoughts on Pay-Per-View and the Perpetual Access Ideal,” Patrick Carr points out, “Through its radical disaggregation of the content being acquired—transitioning from the publisher’s largest unit of content, a ‘big deal’ package, to its smallest unit of content, individual articles—PPV offers a solution whereby libraries can continue to provide a level of access that is comparable to the expansiveness of a package but at what is in many cases a significantly reduced cost.”32

Enhance Content
While some publishers are focusing on price reductions and creative fee structures, others are focusing on enhancing content and differentiating their published content from other journals and from open access material. The rationale is that more appealing content will result in fewer cancellations and more new subscriptions to offset those that are lost. Some ways publishers are enhancing content include:

1. **Increase Issue Content**—Increasing the number of high-quality articles per issue can be a way of adding value to the publication and maximizing subscriptions. There is evidence that some publishers have taken this approach. In a review of approximately 250 journals printed at Allen Press from January through September 2009 and during the same period in 2010, average page counts per journal printed actually increased 4.7% even though average press runs for these same publications decreased 6.6%.

2. **Upgrade Publication Appearance**—Some publishers gave their journal a facelift to help differentiate it from open access content and other publications. Perhaps sprucing up the cover to include new graphics and more color, or updating page layouts to something bolder and more eye-appealing could increase interest in your journal. Reducing author color charges is one way some publishers are attracting more manuscript submissions, infusing color into more articles and bringing the content to life.

3. **Sharp Focus on Content Timeliness and Relevance**—Nothing has the potential to impact subscription retention more than highly relevant and timely content. A close connection to both readers and authors alike is essential for the success of any publication. “So what?” you ask. “This is nothing new.” Agreed. That said, consider what often happens during lean times when a publisher finds it necessary to tighten the budgetary belt. In many commercial and nonprofit organizations, skilled staff positions are cut and remaining editorial staff members must pick up additional responsibilities. When this becomes necessary, the inherent danger lies within the reality that while the editor may be quite competent in performing these new responsibilities, they may...
prove to be a hindrance at a most crucial time when he or she must be the most focused on assuring published content is timely and relevant.

More than ever, it is critical to keep a vigilant eye on timeliness and relevance of the content. To that end it’s important to ask:

- Are there tasks that consume chunks of editorial staff time that could be streamlined and simplified?
- Are there other options for completion of these responsibilities?
- Are there technologies and workflows available that can increase efficiencies and help your editor stay focused on maintaining the author-to-reader connection?
- How can peer review technology be used and processes improved to help editorial staff achieve maximum focus on delivery of timely and relevant content?

Every society is different. No two publications are the same. For publishers in a position of trying to do more with less there are a variety of tools currently available that may be worth a look.

4. Flexible Delivery Options—It is clear that more libraries are moving to online-only subscriptions. The same is true for individual subscribers. But not all have adopted this format. Most societies have found that there is no way around delivering publications in multiple formats. Here and now, many societies are finding that delivering content in multiple formats is critical for greater visibility to content and maximum subscription revenue.

While maximizing current subscription revenues is essential to fund the costs of publication, it is also important to keep an eye toward the future. Our industry is in the midst of a technological transformation in which nobody can predict with certainty how research information will be disseminated in the years ahead. Digital dissemination is sure to continue its evolution for years to come. For a publisher, producing content in a manner flexible enough to be easily delivered through multiple channels and in multiple formats is an important component in planning for the future.

Generate New Revenue
The revenue model for most society publishers is based largely on generation of subscription revenue to fund journal production. For societies experiencing subscription cancellations, finding ways to replace revenue loss is more important than ever. Increasing subscription prices is not an effective long-term solution for replacing revenue lost as a result of subscription cancellations. Some publishers have turned to advertising sales as a way to make up for lost revenue. Others are working with international subscription agents to widen distribution and to increase sales abroad.

Dissemination of critical research has been and always will be the primary role of mission-specific publishers. Society publishers facing declining subscription revenue are searching for ways to fund ongoing publication of the title. For some, the start of the search begins with a very important question: What is the real value of my organization and publication? The answer to this lies in the answers to the following questions:

1. Who performs the research and submits articles for publication in your journal?
2. Who benefits from the information contained within your journal?

Many of the most prominent research authors are respected faculty at leading academic institutions throughout the world. Individuals who benefit from the publication of this research are other researchers—other faculty—and students. What is the value of your organization and publication to faculty and students?

The insights contained within the ITHAKA survey are revealing. It is clear that while the primary mission for many society publishers is dissemination of research, faculty authors perceive the role of the society publisher to be far greater. According to the ITHAKA survey, the opportunity to publish their work and to be recognized among peers is of the highest importance to faculty authors. According to the survey, “Publishing peer-reviewed journals and organizing conferences, in-person meetings,
and facilitating communication about fellowships and jobs are roles of the scholarly society viewed as having paramount importance by faculty. In short, faculty depend on the society as a coordinating body to facilitate peer interactions.

The study also concluded that personal interaction with peers is of much greater importance than online communication and electronic social networking. “In general, faculty value the most traditional roles of their scholarly societies—traditional publishing and organization of meetings—most highly, and show far greater skepticism about newer roles related to more informal and non-traditional scholarly communications.”

Consider also the audience of your publication and the capacities of your organization. Are there opportunities to bridge a network gap, further fulfill author and subscriber needs, expand the reach of your publication, and generate additional revenues through facilitating conferences and organizing annual or quarterly meetings?

Faculty authors are not the only individuals who can benefit from network opportunities. Societies in some sectors have indicated an increase in memberships largely as a result of students seeking to take full advantage of all available networking opportunities. Publisher staff and editors also find conferences and meetings to be a valuable opportunity to stay informed regarding news in the field and to engage with researchers to increase manuscript submissions.

In summary, all indications are that the economic challenges of 2010 are not likely to subside soon. Setting subscription prices during unsettled times is a difficult task. Nevertheless, with challenges come opportunities. For some societies this may be an opportunity to step up efforts to fulfill unmet author and subscriber needs, reevaluate existing processes, or revise subscription price strategies. For others, this may be a time to revitalize journal content and appearance. Still others may see this as an opportunity to exercise patience, stay the course, and ride the storm out. The question now is, what are your 2011 opportunities?

References
2010 Study of Subscription Prices for Scholarly Society Journals: Society Journal Pricing Trends and Industry Overview


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