



THE SEMANTIC WEB JOURNAL

– OPEN AND TRANSPARENT REVIEWING

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Semantic Web – Interoperability, Usability, Applicability

<http://www.semantic-web-journal.net>

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The journal



The journal



Semantic Web – Interoperability, Usability,
Applicability

- international journal
- subscription-based
- open access available as option (author pays)
both print and online



The journal



- only 1 year old
 - other major journals in the field from ca. 2005
- >90 submissions (plus >50 revisions)
 - 10 accepted (several under revision)
- average review turnaround time 65 days



The journal



- only 1 year old
- 50,000 hits on main web page
- top reviewed paper hits: 9 with >1,000
- 192 twitter followers



The journal



- first issue: invited EB member papers
- second issue (forthcoming)

contains papers by
very prominent contributors in the field

- 6 special issue calls posted recently



The review process



The review process



- submitted manuscripts made public
- solicited reviews as usual
 - review text made public
 - reviewer names public (reviewers can opt out)
- open reviews (signed!) possible by everyone
- comments (signed!) possible by everyone

- reviews hidden from web after ca. 8 weeks
- rejected papers also hidden after some time

non-public (RMS)

public (website)



submitted manuscript

copy

submitted manuscript

EiCs assign editor
Editor solicits reviewers

solicited reviews
(reviewer names known)

copy

solicited reviews
(reviewers can opt
for anonymity)

open reviews
and comments
(signed by name
EiC screened)

Decision
(Editor + EiCs)

copy

Decision
(Editor + EiCs)

6-8 weeks





Rationale



Rationale



I was disappointed about too many low-quality anonymous reviews

in a social environment in which it is often deemed inappropriate to complain to the editor (or to the PC chair) about such reviews.



Open & transparent: why? 

why not?

why prefer an asymmetric system to a symmetric system?



why not?



- we gain accountability through transparency
 - transparent choice of reviewers and editors (acknowledged by name on published paper)
 - objectivity of decision process can be judged by everyone
 - some authors publish their “reply to reviews” on the manuscript page (unmasked)
 - reviewers /editors get some visibility and acknowledgement
 - effective avoidance of COIs



why not?



- there are studies which show that review quality is not affected by either procedure (?)
- reviewers should tend to be more careful and constructive, and less likely to show strong bias
- we stop the reviewer-guessing-game
- we can get authors and reviewers into a dialogue if this seems helpful
- good papers get immediate visibility (most paper pages have >500 views to date)



Lessons learned



Lessons Learned



- The reviewing has been very smooth and very constructive so far.
- Most reviews are very substantial and constructive.
- We did not have any major controversies between reviewers and authors.
- We have observed major improvements of papers through revisions.



Lessons Learned



- Non-standard process is additional work
 - monitoring of the process
 - repeated explanation of the process
 - to EB members
 - to reviewers
 - to authors
 - manual management of process
(no ready-to-use tools)



Lessons Learned



- open & transparent: opinions differ
 - very small fraction of reviewers wants to stay anonymous (approx. 5%)
 - only one person so far outright rejected reviewing for the journal because of our process
 - open reviewing is rare (approx. 5% of the papers)
 - some people participate in our journal mainly *because* of our process



Lessons Learned



- open & transparent: opinions differ
 - a few colleagues report being a bit scared about their paper being publically dissected before being accepted for publication
 - reviews tend to be a bit too positive – it is even more important that editor/EiCs do not trust them blindly
 - we receive both substantial critique and cheerful encouragement about our process



My take



- If all journals had open & transparent reviewing ...

... then somebody should start running a journal with anonymous reviewing.





Thanks!

<http://www.semantic-web-journal.net/>

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