

To print or not to print: future directions for ALIA publishing



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I recently attended an *Australian Academic Research Libraries (AARL)* editorial board meeting and the issue that generated most debate at the meeting, and one that has also vexed the ALIA Board of Directors, is the future direction of ALIA publications, in particular the possible transition from print to electronic publishing. Many large university and state libraries have collection policies that identify electronic subscriptions as the preferred medium and no longer want print-based subscriptions to journal titles such as *Australian Academic Research Libraries (AARL)* and the *Australian Library Journal (ALJ)*.

ALIA publishing covers an extensive list of activities including the production of flyers, brochures, reports, press releases, posters, bookmarks etc. What I am primarily concerned with is ALIA's role as a publisher of books and journals, including magazines and newsletters, and the future of such publications in an electronic publishing environment. As the number of electronic journal titles grows, we are seeing the improved access and additional functionality that electronic publishing can provide. In this context ALIA needs to define the future directions for its publishing program.

ALIA's current program does include a mix of both print and electronic publications. Electronic publications include documents on ALIANet, aliaNEWS and the group newsletters. However, ALIA's three major journal titles, *inCite*, *ALJ* and *AARL*, are all published initially in print format, although *ALJ* and *AARL* are made available on ALIANet six months after the initial print issue. This hybrid model raises questions about print costs of production, and the value of subscription costs for members.

inCite has just celebrated 25 years as the Association's news magazine. Members receive a complimentary subscription as part of ALIA membership. *inCite* has constantly changed over its 25-year history in response to various reviews on its role and function, as reported in the December 2004 issue. A survey in January–February 2004, reported in *inCite* in June 2004, raised the question of print or electronic. Responses from members expressed concern that *inCite* might become electronic only. Reassurance was given that this would not happen 'for a very long time, if at all'.

ALJ and *AARL* are high-quality scholarly print publications, both editorially and in terms of production. Articles are refereed and both journals contribute to our professional literature as well as enhance the role of ALIA as a professional association. But over

the past decade there has been a revolution in scholarly publishing, with the access versus ownership debate being firmly resolved in favour of electronic access. In fact the debate has moved on to consider issues concerning open access. We need to consider not only whether it is time to migrate our flagship publications to a wholly-electronic environment but also where ALIA's journal publications sit in the open access debate.

In the past, ALIA's print publishing program also included ALIA conference papers. Conference proceedings are now almost always provided online, or occasionally as a CD-ROM. Although not all members agree with this trend, it nevertheless is a fact that either by accident or by design the intellectual content of our conference program no longer appears in print. ALIA's role has shifted from publishing to ensuring the archiving and preservation of these proceedings on ALIANet.

A member recently queried with me what had happened to ALIA's occasional papers publications, which existed a decade ago. The question raises the issue of whether ALIA's publishing program should again include occasional papers and, if so, what form they should take.

ALIA does publish the occasional print monograph, such as the *Australian dictionary of acronyms and abbreviations (ADAA)* by David Jones, but currently such activity is not common and e-books are yet to be explored.

I have also been asked about the relationship between aliaNEWS and *inCite*. aliaNEWS is an electronic broadcast, designed to deliver timely news on a monthly basis, but publication is ad hoc and it is labour-intensive to produce aliaNEWS as well as *inCite*. Should ALIA continue to produce both? Group newsletters, where they are produced, are now online, reflecting the way in which many of us access information today.

The mission of libraries relates to the preservation and access of information and is closely tied to the activities of publishers concerning journals and monographs. ALIA both supports the mission of libraries and is a publisher of materials that support the library and information industry. Just as other publishers have had to consider the impact of the internet on their publications business model, so the Board of Directors needs to consider future directions for ALIA publishing and determine the best method of advancing scholarly communication and news to its members. This is not a straightforward issue and members are encouraged to share their views on the future of ALIA publishing either through *inCite* or directly with members of the Board of Directors. ■

Feedback to your Board of Directors

Do you have an idea, compliment or concern about your Association? Contact any director and ideas will be reviewed at each Board meeting.

E-mail to feedback@alia.org.au will be automatically forwarded to all Board members.

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