

# The Open Access Interviews

Richard Poynder talks to Matthew Hogan, Editorial Director, Bentham Science Publishers<sup>1</sup>

No one, surely, would now dispute that the Internet is hugely disruptive, and poses a significant threat to many existing business models. For scholarly publishers the primary challenge comes from the so-called [Open Access](#) movement, which calls for research papers to be made freely available on the Web. As a result, publishers face an inevitable decline in their traditional journal subscription business.

How have publishers responded? Initially most ignored Open Access. Then they [attacked it](#), arguing that it was unrealistic, [anti-capitalist](#), or just plain [dangerous](#). But eventually they began to embrace it, and today most scholarly publishers offer an Open Access option that allows researchers to pay publishers an "article processing charge" ([APC](#)) if they want their research to be made freely available on the Web. Alternatively, they can continue to publish without having to pay an APC, but then [self-archive](#) their papers on the Web, and around [91%](#) of scholarly publishers now permit some form of self-archiving, although often only after an embargo period has passed.

Large publishers like [Elsevier](#), [Springer](#) and [Wiley](#) were particularly reluctant to migrate to Open Access. As a result, a number of small publishers — e.g. Biomed Central ([BMC](#)) and [Hindawi](#) — saw in Open Access an opportunity to outmanoeuvre their larger competitors, and generally they have proved successful in this. Other smaller publishers, however, have adopted this strategy less successfully. [Bentham Science Publishers](#) would seem to be a case in point.

Last April Bentham [announced](#) its intention of launching 300 new Open Access journals by the end of the year. The audacity of this announcement should not be underestimated. After all, it has taken BMC eight years to build up a portfolio of 185 OA journals. And at the time of its announcement, Bentham itself was publishing less than 100 subscription journals. Unsurprisingly, therefore Bentham later reduced the number of new journals it planned to launch to [200](#).

## Badly targeted

Even so, it was clear that an aggressive marketing campaign would be needed: For if Bentham was to achieve its goal it would need to recruit hundreds of researchers to act as chief editors, thousands to sit on the editorial boards of the new journals, and thousands more to submit papers to these journals. Consequently before long a constant stream of email invitations was flowing into the inboxes of researchers around the world.

At first the strategy appeared to be working. After all, being on the editorial board of a scholarly journal is a much-cherished ambition for researchers, and the kudos attached to being a chief editor an even more attractive goal; likewise, their constant hunger to be published means that researchers are always on the lookout for publishing opportunities. All in all, therefore, many of those receiving Bentham's invitations initially responded positively.

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<sup>1</sup> This interview with Matthew Honan took place by telephone on 13<sup>th</sup> April 2008

After the first flush of enthusiasm, however, researchers began to question Bentham's activities, not least because many of the invitations they were receiving seemed decidedly badly targeted. For instance, psychologists were being invited to contribute papers on ornithology, health policy researchers were being invited to submit papers on analytical chemistry and economists were being invited to submit papers on sleep research or, even more oddly, invited to join the editorial board of educational journals. This inevitably raised concerns about the likely quality of the new journals, particularly as researchers were being asked to pay from \$600 to \$900 a time for the privilege of being published in them. To add insult to injury, some of the invitations researchers were receiving were addressed to a completely different person, or the name field was empty, and addressed simply to "Dear Dr.". It was hard not to feel more insulted than flattered on receiving such letters.

Moreover, what was clearly an automated mass mailing exercise was proving a little profligate with its invitations, sending them out not just to researchers, but to any Tom, Dick or Harry. On at least one occasion, for instance, a journalist (who asked not to be named) was surprised to receive a letter from Bentham inviting him to submit a paper, "Based on your record of contributions in the field of information science." As he explains, "I was rather surprised by this, since — as a practicing science journalist — I wasn't aware that I had made any such contributions!"

At first the tide of increasingly inappropriate invitations was greeted with a mixture of good humour and head scratching. However, as the flood of email invitations continued unabated the recipients' response shifted from amusement to frustration, and then to anger — especially when they discovered that all requests to be removed from the mailing list were ignored.

### **Spam plague**

By March of this year, senior health care research scientist at the [University of Toronto](#) [Gunter Eysenbach](#) had had enough. Publicly [criticising](#) Bentham's activities on his blog, Eysenbach complained, "In the past couple of months I have received no less than 11 emails from Bentham, all mostly identical in text and form, all signed by 'Matthew Honan, Editorial Director, Bentham Science Publishers' or 'Richard Scott, Editorial Director, Bentham Science Publishers', 'inviting' me to submit research articles, reviews and letters to various journals."

He added, "All pleas and begging from my side to stop the spamming, as well as clicking on any 'unsubscribe' links did not stop the spam plague from Bentham."

For others, the experience of being targeted by Bentham proved even more frustrating. When [Professor John Furedy](#), Emeritus Professor of Psychology at the University of Toronto, received an invitation to be editor-in-chief of the [Open Behavioral Science Journal](#) he initially accepted. But after doing so he found himself being bombarded with further invitations. And when Bentham failed to reply to the questions he raised about the new role he had taken on he decided the best course of action was to withdraw his acceptance, reluctant to be associated with a company that behaved in this way. Even though he had resigned, however, Furedy was surprised to see that his name had been

added to the list of editors on the journal's [web site](#). And despite repeated requests to Bentham to remove it his name remains there to this day.

I too had by now begun receiving copies of Bentham's invitations — not because I was on its mailing list, but because frustrated researchers were forwarding them to me, and asking me to find out what the dickens was going on.

So I emailed various Bentham directors (including Richard Scott and Matthew Honan), all of whom — with the exception of publications director Mahmood Alam — completely ignored my messages. Moreover, while Alam replied, he proved decidedly unwilling to answer my questions, despite repeated promises that he would. He was equally unwilling to put me in contact with anyone else at the company.

I also tried calling the various telephone numbers on the Bentham [web site](#), only to be greeted by voicemail messages. Personally I knew nothing whatsoever about Bentham, so for all I knew it might have been the front for some form of Internet scam.

In the hope of enlightening myself, therefore, I [posted](#) a message to a couple of mailing lists, and shortly afterwards Ted Bergstrom, a professor of economics at the [University of California Santa Barbara](#) posted a [response](#) — a response that confirmed everything I had been hearing from other researchers. I also began to receive private emails with information about Bentham, including the home phone number of Honan, which was sent to me by a publisher concerned that Bentham would bring the scholarly publishing industry into disrepute.

### **A few small errors**

To his credit, when I called Honan he agreed to speak to me then and there and, with one notable exception, answered all my questions. He was, however, adamant that Bentham is not engaged in any kind of spamming. "The criticisms that you have levelled against the company for spamming are unjustified," he said, adding that by posting my message I had only served to "amplify" a few small errors that the company had made.

Honan also insisted that the company always honours requests to be removed from its mailing list, and added that it is doing no more than any other scholarly publisher. As he put it, "Like Bentham, for instance, other publishers periodically send unsolicited emails to mailing lists. The recipients are able to unsubscribe from these publishers' mailing lists if they want to, just as they can from our list." Those researchers who had continued to receive messages after opting had had multiple email addresses, he explained, saying, "We have had very few complaints, and we respond to the complaints that we receive — which are very few in comparison to the number of emails we send out." He did however apologise for any errors that had been made.

The recipients of Bentham's unwelcome invitations, however, remain critical of the company. One of those targeted was [Professor Stevan Harnad](#), professor of cognitive science at [Université du Québec à Montréal](#). He comments, "It is not possible to judge, from the data available, whether Bentham has been negligent or just naive in sending automatic mass form-letters soliciting editors and authors for their many new journal start-ups."

But what has most puzzled researchers is why Bentham would risk damaging its reputation in this way, and so the standing of its pre-existing subscription journals, some of which have over the years earned a [respectable impact factor](#). "Bentham once enjoyed a reputation as a high-priced reputable scholarly publisher," comments [Charles Oppenheim](#), professor of information science at UK-based [Loughborough University](#), another researcher to be targeted by Bentham. "In my view, it has damaged that reputation by the flood of emails it has sent inviting people to join the editorial board of, or contribute to, new OA journals it has launched. Not merely are the emails sometimes misaddressed, but when the publisher has been emailed by the recipient with queries, the publisher rarely replies." Oppenheim concludes, "Bentham has made a mistake by launching so many OA journals and by bombarding scholars with email invitations."

### **Illegal?**

Eysenbach, meanwhile, is less forgiving. Indeed, he is so angry that he is considering suing Bentham under anti-spam laws. Arguing that it is [illegal](#) for businesses to send unsolicited emails to people that have not agreed to receive them, or where no previous contractual relationship exists, he comments, "The law is clear: I didn't have any other previous business relationship with Bentham [when it emailed me]. Unsolicited bulk email is spam, and illegal, and even offering to remove names is not an appropriate remedy." He adds, "I am not a litigious person, but this seems to be worth the effort to take one step further."

Were Eysenbach to take that step, however, it is not clear how successful he would be. As is now evident, Bentham is not a communicative company. And while it has a presence in four countries — the United Arab Emirates, the Netherlands, Pakistan, and Illinois, USA — in all four jurisdictions the contact point is either a [PO Box](#), or c/o address. Moreover, Eysenbach is based in Canada, so even were he to be successful in the courts, enforcing a ruling in another jurisdiction could prove both difficult and expensive. Moreover, his task might be complicated by the fact that the one thing that Honan refused to tell me is who owns Bentham Science Publishers.

Clearly Bentham's activities raise a number of questions about Open Access. Perhaps the most important is this: "Does the incident paint a picture of the future, or was it a one-off event?" After all, in his blog [post](#) Eysenbach pointed the figure not just at Bentham, but at other publishers too, including BMC.

For Harnad there is a clear lesson to be learned. "Let it be an example to Bentham and other publishers that this is not the way to go about starting up journals. It merely gives the publisher, as well as online- and OA-journal publishing, a bad name."

Those wishing to read Honan's response to critics in detail are invited to read the interview below. OA advocates may also be interested to hear details of Bentham's soon-to-be-announced self-archiving policy, and its "limited Open Access option". These too may prove controversial.



**Matthew Honan**

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## The interview begins...

**RP: Bentham Science Publishers is in the process of launching hundreds of Open Access journals. I note that in an [interview](#) you gave in September 2004 you suggested that Open Access wasn't particularly relevant to small publishers like Bentham. Why have you subsequently decided to embrace Open Access, and why so vigorously?**

**MH:** For a number of reasons. First, we felt that the time was right for a small publisher like ourselves to try Open Access. By small publisher here I mean under 100 journals and without a very large turnover. We felt that compared to a big publisher, or indeed a medium-sized publisher, we had less to lose financially by doing so.

We also felt that by branching out into Open Access we wouldn't be taking the same kind of risk to our image that a large publisher like [Elsevier](#), [Wiley](#) or [Springer](#) would be taking. Because it's clear that large publishers with large lists of subscription journals would have to be very, very careful to launch bona fide Open Access journals. They are launching Open Access journals too of course, but not in the way that we are.

We were also increasingly conscious that print subscription holdings are being reduced compared to online holdings, which are shooting up. The fact is that with the growth of the Internet, traditional revenue from library subscriptions is no longer as important as it used to be.

**RP: So it was a business decision?**

**MH:** It was, but in addition I would say that I have been following the Open Access movement very carefully and, business issues aside, it is in itself a marvellous idea. I used to be a researcher in chemistry, so I can see that it is also a very good thing for scientists, especially those from the developing world — who are now able to publish at a low rate or, where waivers are available, at no cost at all.

The other point to make is that — leaving aside major journals like [Nature](#) and [Science](#) — print STM subscription journals have relatively small circulations. So it is a wonderful thing that researchers can now have their work published in a way that maximises its dissemination via the Internet.

**RP: I think the [initial](#) plan was to launch 300 OA journals. The Bentham Open [website](#) now talks about 200 journals. Have you had to scale back your ambitions?**

**MH:** It's true that that is the way we initially announced it.

**RP: What changed?**

**MH:** Our original plan was to launch separate Letters, Reviews and Full Research publications, but some of our editors thought that it would weaken the list if we split it up too finely; and in thinking about it ourselves we reached the same conclusion — because, as you probably know, Open Access journals are difficult to start; to get a critical mass of papers is not easy.

So we thought it would make sense for us to change course, which we did in the first part of last year. At that point we decided to create single titles that would publish all three different types of paper.

**RP: Have all 200 of the journals now been launched?**

**MH:** We have got about 178 journals up and running at the moment. So it's been quite a positive success so far.

**RP: How many papers are these journals generally publishing?**

**MH:** I would say two thirds of them publish between one to five papers a month. The others are only just beginning, or in early phases of development.

**RP: Are there regular publication dates for the journals? Are they, say, all published once a month on the same day (e.g. the first day of the month)?**

**MH:** With a few exceptions, Open Access journals do not have regular publication dates, and neither do the Bentham Open journals. As soon as an article is accepted for publication it is published and there is one journal volume per year for each journal.

This, by the way, is a key advantage of Open Access for authors: As there is no need to wait until a journal issue is closed for publication Open Access articles can be processed and published faster than in a subscription journal.

## Author fees

**RP: You say that it is difficult to get a critical mass of papers. It is for this reason presumably that some of the Bentham Open journals are publishing only one or two papers a month and some are experiencing months where no papers at all are published. You are having difficulty attracting papers?**

**MH:** Well, yes and no. In large subject areas like biotechnology we have been very fortunate in getting quite a number of papers, over 30 papers so far, whereas in narrow areas, where there isn't so much research taking place internationally, the quantity is much lower.

This is not unique to Bentham Open. As you will be aware, researchers are reluctant to part with money to publish their papers. When [Biomed Central](#) started in 2000 it too found it very difficult to build up a significant paper flow for its journals. There were maybe only four to ten articles in the first volume — or maybe a dozen, depending on the subject area.

Actually, we are proud to be offering a relatively low fee for our Open Access titles.

**RP: What is the fee for publishing in a Bentham Open journal?**

**MH:** For a published Letter or Mini-Review the publication fee is \$600. For each published Research article it is \$800, and we charge \$900 for each published Review article. These details are all [available](#) on our web site. So we are pleased that we have managed to keep our rates under \$1,000. I don't know of any company — except perhaps [Hindawi](#) — that offers such low author fees.

The point is that we are not in this to make a quick buck, although clearly if we build up a huge list then we will put up our prices eventually. That is not our current intention however. Our aim is to make our journals attractive enough that researchers feel they can afford the fees, not least scientists from the developing world.

**RP: Do you have a fee-waiver scheme?**

**MH:** We give a 30% discount to people from the developing world. In addition, until the end of this year we are offering a 70% discount to editorial board members of Bentham Open journals — which we plan to announce soon. And editors-in-chief are allowed to publish between one and three papers free in our Open Access journals.

**RP: The fees are the same for all the Bentham Open journals are they?**

**MH:** Yes, it is a flat rate.

**RP: Do you have an institutional membership scheme [similar](#) to that offered by Biomed Central?**

**MH:** We plan to. The details are under discussion presently.

**RP: Are there optional print versions of the journals?**

**MH:** There are no print versions of any of the Bentham Open Journals and there are no plans to introduce any. Bentham Open journals are freely available online with no subscription fee.

**RP: I notice there is a [reprint link](#) from all the Bentham Open journal web pages. How does that work?**

**MH:** Authors of an Open Access article may order printed reprints of their articles. We do not foresee receiving many orders but it does offer the option, especially in the case of corporate-sponsored articles or supplements published to provide high quality reprints of the published work.

## Subscriptions

**RP: In addition to your OA journals Bentham publishes around 90 subscription journals, and has done so now for a number of years. Do you plan to make these journals Open Access too?**

**MH:** Well to a certain degree they already are — because authors have the choice of paying a fee in order to make them freely available online for an indefinite period.

**RP: How much do you charge for that?**

**MH:** Our rates are between \$1,400 and \$2,800 per article, depending on which journal the paper is published in.



**RP: Does that imply that your subscription journals will be migrated to an Open Access model over time?**

**MH:** I don't know. Bear in mind that our subscription journals are predominantly review journals. Where we do publish Bentham Open journals in similar areas we don't publish reviews. We don't want to cannibalise our subscription journals.

One innovative thing we have just introduced is to also offer a limited Open Access option. I don't know any other publisher that has done that.

**RP: How does it work?**

**MH:** It allows an author to pay a lesser fee for publishing a paper Open Access. Here I am talking about our subscription journals — so instead of paying the \$1,400 or \$2,800 author's fee to have their paper freely available for an indefinite period, a researcher can opt for a 50% reduction, and have the article Open Access for a year only. This allows more flexibility for the author in terms of how much he can afford to pay and the time he wants his article to be Open Access.

The logic here is that the number of citations a paper receives tends to decline after 12 months. So we don't want to charge somebody a lot of money to have their article up for an indefinite period, when the number of citations they receive will all occur in the first six to twelve months. That is something we are offering that no other publisher currently does. We believe it to be a real innovation.

**RP: Presumably the difference between your Open Access journals and your subscription journals is the contract: With the subscription journals you take all rights in the way that publishers have traditionally done, whereas with the Open Access papers you take no rights, and publish them under a creative commons licence?**

**MH:** That is correct.

**RP: I have been unable to find a copyright notice in any of the Bentham Open papers. Have I missed them?**

**MH:** All Bentham Open journals are published under the [creative commons attribution license version 2.5](#). There is a statement to this effect on the Web [site](#), under the section, "Important to know for librarians & authors".

We are also going to state the licence at the end of each published article on Bentham Open by 1<sup>st</sup> May 2008.

**RP: Are authors who publish in Bentham's subscription journals free to self-archive their papers?**

**MH:** Our policy on self-archiving will be announced shortly.

**RP: What will the policy be?**

**MH:** We will be announcing that we allow self archiving, but only 12 months after publication.



## Peer Review

**RP: Let's return to the topic of Bentham's OA journals: as I understand it, Bentham Open papers are all peer reviewed. Is the process exactly the same as for the Bentham subscription journals?**

**MH:** Yes. All articles submitted to both Bentham Open and Bentham subscription journals are rigorously peer reviewed by at least three to four reviewers (one of whom has to be a member of the journal's editorial board).

There is no other difference in the review procedure with Bentham Open other than that we request each author to provide the names of four referees whom we may decide to consult for evaluation of the manuscript. We only use an author's recommended referee, by the way, if we cannot ourselves first find a suitable referee.

This is what we state in the covering letter that each author has to submit along with their manuscript to Bentham Open:

"The names and affiliations of four referees which Bentham Open may decide to consult for the evaluation of the manuscript should be listed below.

"Any suggested peer reviewers should not have published with any of the authors of the manuscript within the past five years and should not be members of the same research institution.

"Members of the Editorial Board of the journal can be nominated. Suggested reviewers will be considered alongside potential reviewers identified by their publication record or recommended by Editorial Board members."

**RP: I was talking to another publisher the other day and he told me that you intended to dispense with editors for the Bentham Open journals. Is that correct?**

**MH:** You mean editors-in-chief?

**RP: Yes, editors-in-chief.**

**MH:** That is not correct. Or rather I should say, that may have been correct three or four months ago — when we thought we didn't need editors-in-chief — but it is not correct today.

**RP: What changed?**

**MH:** If you want to create a good journal it is important to build a strong team, which means that, in addition to the publisher, you need an editorial board, and you need a mentor inside the publishing process; an editor-in-chief in other words.

If you look at Biomed Central journals, by the way, you will see that most of them don't have editors-in-chief. BMC receives all the manuscripts itself, and does all the processing. We do that as well, but BMC relies on a huge network of editors in different fields.

**RP: Whereas Bentham Open has now concluded that it should have chief editors?**

**MH:** Yes, and right now we are busy recruiting chief editors for all our Open Access journals.

**RP: Right. Some of your journals have no chief editors listed on their web site. That's because you haven't recruited them yet?**

**MH:** Correct, that will be because we haven't yet found an editor-in-chief for those journals.

**RP: Another publisher suggested to me that some of the Bentham Open journals are very broad in scope. As such, he said, they are more like databases than journals?**

**MH:** I would disagree with that comment. If you look at Public Library of Science [[PLOS](#)] or Biomed Central [[BMC](#)] — the two most well-known publishers of Open Access journals — you will see that they have very broad titles too. [PLOS Biology](#) and [BMC Biology](#), for example, are very broad. We also have a broad [biology journal](#), but that is the only very broad one we have, and it is broad because it competes with these other titles.

There are a few other subject areas where our journals are on the broad side — biotechnology for example, and chemistry. Chemistry, by the way, is our forte. If you look at our [subscription list](#) you will see that we have a very good reputation in publishing high-impact-factor subscription journals in pharmaceutical science.

## Mandates

**RP: Do you think the Open Access model is the future for journal publishing?**

**MH:** It will be eventually, but it is going to take some time. And what will drive it will not be decisions by researchers so much as government legislation, especially in those disciplines where funding is provided by governments rather than private organisations.

So it will vary. In areas like chemistry and engineering where it is very easy to get money from the pharmaceutical industry and from engineering companies there will be less pressure. In the social sciences and other areas where it is very difficult to get private money, researchers rely very heavily on government support, and the support of universities, so we can expect to see Open Access grow more quickly in these areas.

**RP: When you say government legalisation I assume you are referring to the growing tendency for research funders to impose mandates on the scientists they fund, requiring them to ensure that their papers are freely available on the Internet?**

**MH:** Yes. We have seen the recent [mandate](#) introduced by the National Institutes of Health [[NIH](#)] in the US, for example, and we have seen a [mandate](#) introduced by the [Wellcome Trust](#) in the UK. In addition, there was the recent [vote](#) at [Harvard University](#) that will mean researchers will be required to self-archive their papers. So the more one reads about what is happening the more one can see that Open Access is picking up steam.

**RP: What are the implications of this for publishers?**

**MH:** If you want my frank opinion on whether it is going to put the big STM publishers like Elsevier and Wiley out of business I don't want to comment. That would be pure speculation.

Suffice it to say, however, that if researchers can publish their articles anywhere they want — be it in an Elsevier journal or one of our Open Access journals, or indeed in one of our subscription journals, or the journals of any other scholarly publisher, the choice is up to the researcher.

So if Open Access journals become increasingly important in terms of the quality of science published in them and the number of citations they receive — and research shows that papers published in Open Access journals receive high citations, because they are more visible — then those journals will increasingly become the journals of choice for more and more researchers. Some of the more established Open Access journals from Biomed Central, for instance, are now getting very respectable impact factors.

**RP: Do I conclude from this that you believe Open Access levels the playing field, and so makes it easier for small publishers to compete with large publishers?**

**MH:** I think it does yes. And if we play it right I think Bentham Open stands a good chance of doing just that. Biomed Central also has a very good chance: it is becoming very profitable. I also think a few other small publishers will do well out of Open Access.

## Spam?

**RP: As you know, I initially contacted Bentham after a number of researchers complained to me that they are being bombarded with email messages from the company asking them to contribute papers to its Open Access journals. What has particularly annoyed them is that their requests to be removed from your mailing list have been ignored. In short, they say that Bentham is spamming them.**

**MH:** That's simply not true. The particular people who contacted you have multiple email addresses. That means that when they asked to be removed from our list we removed them — as we always do when we are asked — but they continued to receive messages via their other email addresses. We can only completely remove them from our list if they give us all their email addresses.

**RP: If the explanation is that simple I'm wondering why I could get no one at Bentham to speak to me about this, or answer my questions. You will know (since I copied you into my e-mails) that I sent a number of emails to Bentham's director of publications Mahmood Alam. He consistently failed to answer my questions. At one point he said that he had not done so because his computer had crashed and he had lost them. When I resent them, however, he still failed to answer them, or put me in touch with anyone else who would. Eventually he stopped replying all together. Why would that be?**

**MH:** I think he felt that the questions you were posing — which included questions about the ownership of Bentham and the backgrounds of Bentham managers — were a bit too forward. If your enquiries had been restricted to the publishing programme, rather than criticisms about our spamming researchers, or questions about Bentham managers, it would have been different.

In any case, the criticisms that you have levelled against the company for spamming are unjustified. We are mailing researchers on a limited basis to try and kick-start a number of Open Access journals, as indeed are a lot of other publishing companies. Like Bentham, for instance, other publishers periodically send unsolicited emails to mailing lists. The recipients are able to unsubscribe from these publishers' mailing lists if they want to, just as they can from our list.

**RP: What I suggest cannot be denied is that there is a lot of unhappiness amongst researchers about the mailing activities of Bentham. As I said, I have been contacted by many of them, and they have sent me copies of the Bentham letters. There has clearly been a problem with the marketing of Bentham Open journals. Do you not agree?**

**MH:** It's true that we have made a few mistakes, but unfortunately those small errors were amplified when you [posted](#) your message to a number of Internet mailing lists.

I would add that it is not our intention to do this for an indefinite period, or to intensify it. We plan to reduce the number of messages we send out once the new Open Access journals are on their feet. It is actually proving very difficult to get these journals started, but spamming researchers is absolutely not our objective.

**RP:** *There are also concerns about the accuracy and relevance of some of your messages. I have been forwarded Bentham letters inviting researchers to sit on the editorial boards of journals that are entirely unsuited to the researcher's areas of expertise. You will have seen that [Professor Ted Bergstrom](#) also made this [point](#) on the [Liblicense](#) mailing list. Other researchers have had similarly inappropriate invitations. Researchers have also complained to me that they have accepted invitations from Bentham that they later regretted, but have been unable to get Bentham to remove their names from the journal web site. As such, they feel their names are being used to endorse Bentham journals despite their concerns about the company's activities.*

**MH:** That is not true; it is not true at all. We have had very few complaints, and we respond to the complaints that we receive — which are very few in comparison to the number of emails we send out.

## Specific case

**RP:** *Let me refer to a specific case then. [Professor John Furedy](#), an Emeritus Professor of Psychology at the University of Toronto, tells me that he was invited to be editor-in-chief of the [Open Behavioral Science Journal](#). He initially accepted, but later regretted his decision, and asked to withdraw. Nevertheless, his name was put on the [list](#) of editorial board members of the journal and — despite Furedy's repeated requests to have his name removed — Bentham failed to take it down. Last time I looked at the journal web [page](#) Furedy was still listed as a member of the editorial board. Furedy commented to me, "I think I make a nice anecdotal case for how academics can fall into this trap. And as far as I know, they are still using my name despite my several (unanswered) requests to have it removed."*

**MH:** I can't respond to this case as I haven't personally received Professor Furedy's request. It must have gone to the journal manager, or whoever he contacted at Bentham. But I assure you that anybody who requests to have their name removed from the editorial board will have that request respected. Professor is welcome to contact me and I will immediately do my best to have his name removed from the [board](#).

**RP:** *One of the reasons Professor Furedy decided he'd rather not be associated with Bentham is that even after he had responded to your initial invitation he continued to be bombarded with e-mail invitations from the company. And like Professor Bergstrom, he was surprised that many of the messages he received were invitations to sit on the editorial board of journals for which he is totally unqualified — journals like the [Open Ornithology Journal](#) for instance.*

**MH:** Again, I can't speak about this particular case; it is highly unusual for this kind of criticism to arise. I simply haven't heard it before.

Look I am aware of some of the mistakes that we've made, and we will of course correct them. If we didn't we wouldn't be a professional company. But it is unfortunate that these errors have been amplified and so have given us bad credit where it is not needed.

**RP: I cannot know whether by seeking information via a mailing list I amplified the problem, but given the number of complaints I have seen I doubt it. However, I hope you can see that in the light of the company's refusal to answer my questions there was no other way for me to establish what was going on. Had you, Mahmood Alam — or any of the other Bentham employees I copied into my messages — replied it would not have been necessary?**

**MH:** Right, yes.

**RP: I also emailed you personally on 30<sup>th</sup> March asking you for an interview.**

**MH:** That's right yes. Well, I am very busy. I can only repeat that we try the very best we can with the list. We research as carefully as possible before putting a researcher on the list.

**RP: What research do you do? Where do you get the email addresses from?**

**MH:** We look carefully at the cited authors listed in important journals, we look at what those authors are publishing, we carefully correlate that information, and then we ask people to submit their CVs. When then look at their publications. And we've had a lot of success. If you look at our list, and if you look at our editorial boards for these journals, they are extremely good.

**RP: Yet Professor Bergstrom says that when he looked at the editorial board members listed for your economics journal most of the names were unknown to him. Since he is a professor of economics at the [University of California Santa Barbara](#), his conclusion was that the editorial board members for our economics journal are researchers with very little visibility in the world of economics.**

**MH:** Again, I can't comment on every single journal. But if you refer to a specific journal we would have to look at it again very carefully. As I said, we are trying to be as accurate as possible in the research we do. If we are clearly missing out on some things then I accept that the criticism may be fair.

I repeat: Our objective is to create a portfolio of high-quality Open Access journals in the sciences, and we have been praised by a lot of people actually. If you look at the [comments](#) on our website you will see as much.

**RP: I think that many of those comments are endorsements of the principle of Open Access rather than specific endorsements of Bentham or its journals. I also think that many [refer](#) to your peer-reviewed journals rather than your Open Access journals.**

**MH:** No, that is not true at all. If you have read the Bentham Open site you will see that there are a number of comments specifically related to our Open Access journals.

## Ownership

**RP: I'm told you once worked for Elsevier. Is that right?**

**MH:** Yes, I did.

**RP: In what capacity?**

**MH:** I was in marketing.

**RP: Can you clarify your role at Bentham?**

**MH:** My title is editorial director.

**RP: I note you were described as both editorial director and managing director in the [Access interview](#) I referred to earlier. Are you still the managing director?**

**MH:** I am one of the directors, so it is true that I am one of the managing directors.

**RP: Richard Morrisy, who I understand is a US-based [Bentham employee](#), describes you as the sales and marketing director for Bentham. Is that also one of your hats?**

**MH:** No. That is not true.

**RP: One of the Bentham managers I tried to make contact with was Richard Scott. I did so because a lot of the letters that were e-mailed to researchers were signed by Scott, who also described himself as the Bentham editorial director. Who is Richard Scott?**

**MH:** He was based in our UAE office and was in charge of the Open Access campaign, but he no longer works with us.

**RP: When did he leave?**

**MH:** About a month ago.

**RP: Some of the letters that Scott signed were dated as recently as April 3<sup>rd</sup>. On 31<sup>st</sup> March Mahmood Alam sent me Scott's email address, so presumably he believed that Scott was still an employee two weeks ago.**

**MH:** No. We were using his name but he has recently left. So that's not true.

**RP: Why did he leave?**

**MH:** He just had enough of the company; he wanted to move on.

**RP: Can I return to one of the questions I originally put to Mahmood Alam. As I understand it Bentham is a private company. Who owns it, and where it is based?**

**MH:** Bentham Science Publishers is owned by a number of individuals, and the legal part of the business is based in the United Arab Emirates.

**RP: Who are these individuals?**

**MH:** I can't disclose their names to you.

**RP: I have been told that the company is headed-up by the Minister for Higher Education for Pakistan, [Professor Atta-ur-Rahman, FRS](#). Is that correct?**

**MH:** I have no comment on that.

**RP: It is Rich Morrisy's understanding that it is so.**

**MH:** Well, maybe his sources are wrong. I can't say. He may know some things about the company, but he doesn't know everything.

**RP: So it would be inaccurate to say that Professor Atta-ur-Rahman is involved in the company in any way?**

**MH:** He is involved in so much that he edits a [number](#) of Bentham journals.

**RP: He has no financial interest in the company?**

**MH:** No.

**RP: And never has?**

**MH:** Yes, in terms of the editorial activities for the journals he edits.

**RP: The thing that most puzzles me is that there appears to be considerable secrecy about Bentham Science Publishers. Why is that?**

**MH:** There is nothing secret about the company.

**RP: But you won't tell me who owns it?**

**MH:** I am prepared to say that a number of individuals own the company, and that it is based in the United Arab Emirates. But that is all I am prepared to say on that question.

**RP: Ok, thank you for your time.**



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