The OA Interviews: Sciyo CEO Aleksandar Lazinica

In their efforts to derail the onward march of Open Access (OA) opponents have conjured up a number of bogeymen about Open Access publishing. First, they maintain, asking authors to pay to publish could turn scholarly publishing into a vanity press. Second, they say, OA publishing will in any case inevitably lead to lax or even non-existent peer review. Third, they argue, OA publishing is not financially sustainable. I felt the breath of all three bogeymen on the back of my neck recently, as I conducted an email interview with the CEO of OA publisher Sciyo, Aleksandar Lazinica — an interview that led the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA) to ask Sciyo to remove OASPA's logo from its web site.

Richard Poynder, February 12th 2010

At the heart of the criticism deployed against OA publishing is the claim that levying an article processing charge (APC) on authors will inevitably corrupt the age-old process of scholarly publishing, and the independent peer review system on which it is based.

Certainly one obvious consequence of "author-pays" publishing is that the nature of the relationship between publisher and author changes radically from the traditional arrangement. While most researchers will doubtless obtain the necessary funds to pay to publish from their institution or funder, they nevertheless become paying customers of publishers not, as heretofore, supplicants seeking a free publishing slot.

For publishers it means migrating from a business environment in which their marketing efforts are focused primarily on selling journal subscriptions to intermediary libraries, to one where they have to sell a publishing service directly to authors.

Amongst other things, this means that many OA publishers have had to start using the mass marketing techniques characteristic of business-to-consumer (B2C) markets, rather than the business-to-business (B2B) methods traditionally associated with scholarly publishing.

Cultural shift

For some publishers this cultural shift proved difficult, with angry researchers reporting that they were being bombarded with spam messages that — they complained — were unwelcome, badly targetted, and probably illegal.[1]

The spam plague was exacerbated by a rash of new publishers entering the market and launching hundreds of new journals — for which it was necessary to recruit in double quick time thousands of researchers willing to sit on journal editorial boards and submit papers.

By the end of 2008 it was clear that unless something was done the entire OA publishing industry could fall into disrepute. Consequently a group of OA publishers — including BioMed

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[1] Some argue, for instance, that legislation like the UK Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations 2003 and New Zealand's Unsolicited Electronic Messages Act, outlaws the "cold calling" approach that some OA publishers are even now engaging in.

Central (BMC), Public Library of Science (PLoS) and Hindawi — created a new organisation called the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA).

One of the main tasks OASPA set itself was to "Promote a uniform definition of OA publishing, best practices for maintaining and disseminating OA scholarly communications, and ethical standards."

How effective OASPA has proved in reducing the spam plague remains for now unclear. In the middle of last year, for instance, I myself (a journalist, not a researcher) received several bulk email messages inviting me to submit papers to a couple of scientific journals published by OASPA co-founder BMC.[2]

But however legitimate these continuing mass solicitations may be, their effectiveness has to be in doubt — since it inevitably means asking recipients to pay to publish, and researchers are used to getting their papers published in a very different way. As Cornell postgraduate student Phil Davis put it last year: "Most of the journals in which I aspire to publish never ask me for a manuscript. They don't need to. They receive thousands of voluntary contributions each year and turn most away."

As a result, many researchers receiving these messages immediately conclude they are being invited to participate in some form of vanity publishing, particularly when the invitations arrive from unknown publishers. This serves to breathe life into the vanity press bogeyman.

These suspicions lead naturally to the further conclusion that, even if the invitations are not from a vanity publisher, since there must be huge pressure to accept papers (in order to generate revenue), the publishers concerned will inevitably set more lax peer review standards than traditional subscription publishers.

Such fears were fuelled last June when it was reported that OA publisher Bentham Open had accepted a software-generated "nonsense" paper, for which it demanded a publishing fee of $800. With a chorus of "we told you so", critics quickly wheeled out the peer-review bogeyman.

And such incidents, combined with the dawning realisation that mass email invitations are as likely to alienate researchers as they are to "clinch a sale", inevitably also feeds the "sustainable business model" bogeyman, with critics arguing that OA publishers have still to arrive at a viable business proposition.

Free for all

Against this background my curiosity was piqued last December when I received a press release from an OA publisher called Sciyo announcing that it was discontinuing charging APCs for the papers it publishes in its journals.

The release also announced that Sciyo plans, from this year, to pay royalties to authors who publish chapters in its OA books (although these authors *will* still pay an APC — of 470 euro). The royalties, the release explained, will be based on the number of times an author's chapter is downloaded. Curious, I emailed Sciyo and proposed an email interview. My request was

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[2] BMC publisher Matthew Cockerill, however, vehemently denied that the company had done anything untoward in emailing me in this way, or that it has ever been overzealous in its direct marketing activities.

accepted, and after several interchanges with the company's Communications Director Jelena Katic, I was passed over to the CEO of Sciyo, Aleksandar Lazinica.

As the interview proceeded I also learned that Sciyo views its current strategy as a transitional arrangement only: the long-term plan, said Lazinica, is to dispense with APCs all together, and move to what he called a "free for all" environment — in which all the research Sciyo publishes (both journals *and* books) will be published without charge, but will nevertheless be made freely available on the Internet.

"We strongly believe that the APC has no future," Lazinica told me, adding that Sciyo is therefore exploring a number of alternative revenue streams. In the interim, he added, the APCs generated by charging authors to publish book chapters will subsidise the cost of publishing papers without charge in Sciyo's journals.

Could it be, I wondered, that Sciyo has discovered a business model able to slay both the vanity press and sustainability bogeymen in one fell swoop?

For the moment that's not clear, since Lazinica would not go into details about the alternative revenue streams he is exploring, although he did provide a clue: "We are basing our future development on the assumption that in the online environment the number of eyeballs is what counts and that people using a particular service do not necessarily have to be the ones paying for it," he told me, adding, "As soon as we're ready, we will be sharing the specifics with the community."

Time will tell. But what about the peer review bogeyman?

Scepticism

I took time out between the to-ing and fro-ing of emails with Sciyo to do some web research.

As a result I discovered that Sciyo is not a new company, but one originally founded in 2004 as In-Tech. And I recalled that In-Tech was a publisher already known to me. I had first come across it in 2007, when I was alerted to the fact that researchers had begun complaining that they were receiving what they felt were suspicious invitations to pay to publish book chapters. On contacting the company, however, I was told that the invitations were entirely legitimate.

But similar complaints have continued to dog the company. Last year one disgruntled researcher — who said he had received repeated invitations from In-Tech — wondered whether he might have been targeted by a variation of the so-called Nigerian Scam.

A press release published last November announced that In-Tech had been renamed Sciyo. This has not, however, curtailed criticism of its email solicitations, with recipients still inclined to believe that they are being approached by a vanity press, or even perhaps a disreputable organisation. Sciyo's offer of royalties has likewise been greeted with scepticism.

To its credit, Sciyo appears to have been assiduous in its efforts to reply publicly to critics, insisting that those receiving its email invitations are not chosen randomly, and that all Sciyo's publications "undergo rigorous refereeing". As such, the company stresses, "Chapters which don't meet the quality criteria do not get published, meaning it is not vanity publishing or any

sort of pay-to-publish scheme."

Faced with what appeared to be an increasingly muddy picture I emailed a dozen or so authors who had published with In-Tech/Sciyo. Only a few replied, but the responses I received were not entirely positive.

Commenting on Sciyo's plans to pay royalties, one of those I contacted emailed me: "I do not think this would be for the benefit of the authors but of the journal. It pushes authors to advertise their work (as if it were perfume in Harrods) in order to receive a small amount of money. The journal will receive more visits and therefore it will be ranked in the best places of the scientific community."

Achilles Heel

Another one of the authors to reply was critical of In-Tech/Sciyo's peer review process. As he put it, "The review process is blind, but it is actually non-existent. We never received any real review for our papers, rather just an acceptance note for an initial abstract. The full papers were not reviewed at all and, furthermore, for some papers we did not have a chance for proof reading. Finally, two articles of ours were published without notifying us at all, in one case (the journal) the initially submitted draft was taken as it was and suddenly appeared on the web some months later (I just accidentally noticed this publication when I searched the web)."

He added: "I do not know how their review process works internally, but from what I experienced and heard from others, I fear, in comparison to all other publishers/journals/books I have experiences with, In-Tech/Sciyo ... well, I cannot even begin to compare it. It is simply highly unprofessional."

Other researchers have posted comments directly on the Web claiming that work they have published with In-Tech was also not peer reviewed.

When I asked Lazinica to comment on this he was unfazed, saying: "Admittedly, consistency in peer review is our Achilles heel and it is also one of our priorities in 2009/10. We do not have a bullet proof review system yet. We have managed to improve the process a lot but there is still an unacceptably high deviation in the quality between the publications."

From one perspective Lazinica's response could be viewed as refreshingly honest. When Bentham Open was accused of not conducting proper peer review the publisher repeatedly denied the charges — even after the editor of the Bentham journal concerned resigned, complaining that he had not seen the fake paper before it was accepted.[3]

Lazinica, by contrast, appeared to be holding up his hands and saying a loud *mea culpa* about the inadequacy of In-Tech/Sciyo's peer review. (Although when I asked him to confirm whether the problem was a consequence of inadequate peer reviewers, or whether the company does not always send papers out for external review, he declined to answer directly).

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[3] It is, of course, possible that the allegations made against Bentham were inaccurate.

Outdated

From another perspective, Lazinica's response suggests that the OA peer review bogeyman is alive and well.

For Lazinica went on to argue that the current model of peer review is in any case outdated. He added rhetorically: "[W]hat is the purpose of such reviews, other than to be seen to be abiding by some formal regulations? Scientific publishing today is still at the same level as it was in the 19th century, with journals and the review process still the main parts of it. After more than 100 years, I believe it's time to move on and apply new mechanisms. Readers are the ones who should review the article by reading it or not."

The implication appears to be that Lazinica believes peer review would be better conducted after publication, rather than prior to it.

As it happens, many would be sympathetic to Lazinica's views. Peer review is regularly criticised for being little more than a charade.

Writing in *The Lancet* ten years ago Richard Horton famously put it this way: "Editors and scientists alike insist on the pivotal importance of peer review. We portray peer review to the public as a quasi-sacred process that helps to make science our most objective truth teller. But we know that the system of peer review is biased, unjust, unaccountable, incomplete, easily fixed, often insulting, usually ignorant, occasionally foolish, and frequently wrong."

And since then, many believe, peer review has got worse. Only this month the BBC reported that an open letter had been sent to major scientific journals by 14 leading stem cell researchers alleging that "papers that are scientifically flawed or comprise only modest technical increments often attract undue profile. At the same time publication of truly original findings may be delayed or rejected".

The claim, said the BBC, is that "a small group of scientists is effectively vetoing high quality science from publication in journals."

Critics argue, the BBC added, that in some cases "it might be done to deliberately stifle research that is in competition with their own."

Problematic

But however justified Lazinica's views on the inadequacies of peer review may be, it is perhaps problematic when a publisher responds to criticism of his own peer review process by arguing that the practice is outdated.

For whether one likes it or not, peer review remains the sacred cow of scholarly publishing. However inadequate and pointless the research community may at times feel it to be, any publisher speaking out against peer review needs first to be able to demonstrate that his system is as good as it gets.

Moreover, publicly Sciyo appears to take a somewhat different line on the quality of its peer-review. "We aim to provide quality tools and infrastructure facilitating science communication,"

it says on its web site. "That means providing first-class peer reviewed literature compliant with the highest standards of scientific publishing and then making it freely available to anyone, anywhere in the world."

And if Lazinica is happy to concede that his company does not have a bullet-proof peer review system in place those researchers paying 470 euro to publish book chapters are bound to wonder what they are getting for their money, particularly given that Sciyo expects authors to help market their work.

Finally, Lazinica's comments will doubtless concern other OA publishers who, as we have said, face continuing claims that OA inevitably means lax or non-existent peer review. As the author who spoke to me about his experiences of publishing with In-Tech put it, "It might be that I have a little bias regarding OA resulting from my past experience with this publisher."

Unsurprisingly, therefore, OA advocates were concerned to hear Lazinica's views on peer review, particularly since In-Tech was a member of OASPA (as was Sciyo until my interview), and OASPA was created to ensure high standards in OA publishing, including the best possible peer review.

As one member of the OA community commented to me (on a non-attributable basis) after reading Lazinica's remarks: "Sciyo seems to plead guilty to the charge that it skimps on peer review. First it says that peer review is the company's Achilles Heel. Then it pretends that peer review is an obsolete 19th century practice and argues that readers should judge for themselves. Although these two replies are actually inconsistent, they both acknowledge serious laxity (in the first case, inadvertent and regrettable, and in the second case deliberate and advantageous). This laxity should be a concern to OASPA."

OA advocate [Stevan Harnad](#) also believes that OASPA should be concerned: "Sciyo seems to want to do high-volume, fleet publishing; they don't seem to be doing peer review; probably they can't find the competent reviewers willing to review for them; and now they think readers should do the reviewing. (Journals with such low-level standards and practices are just capitalising on author publish-or-perish needs to produce a product that could never survive if they had to charge subscriptions to user institutions, rather than publication charges to eager authors.)"

And with Sciyo's emailing activities continuing to attract criticism from recipients — many of whom assume that they are being spammed haphazardly — the publisher's activities seem to pose a double challenge to the OA publishing industry: OASPA's web site states quite clearly that: "Any direct marketing activities publishers engage in shall be appropriate and unobtrusive."

In other words, OASPA would appear to deprecate spamming. Yet, as Harnad points out, Sciyo's recruitment process "looks to me like spamming."

While we should certainly welcome the kind of experimentation that Sciyo is engaged in, one is tempted to conclude that its activities will make it more difficult for OASPA to slay the bogeymen that critics of OA publishing have conjured up.

However, Lazinica denies that the company has done anything OASPA should be concerned about: "All Sciyo's activities conform to OASPA's ethical standards," he told me.

And on its marketing activities he said: Our author database to date consists of a respectable

number of registered members. These are informed about Sciyo activities on regular basis."

Yet messages appearing on the Web complaining about the company's activities would seem to belie this — e.g. this message posted by Dr Sanjay Velamparambil in March 2009.

Same but different

When I contacted OASPA President Caroline Sutton for her views she commented: "OASPA takes very seriously the importance of compliance by its members with its code of conduct, including ensuring that peer review processes are genuine, and that email marketing is responsible. The issues raised regarding In-Tech/Sciyo will be carefully reviewed by OASPA, and action will be taken if they are found to be substantiated."

In a spirit of transparency, Sutton sent a copy of her quote to Sciyo, at which point there was a strange twist in events: Shortly afterwards, I received an email from Lazinica. "I am surprised by the review issue, and do not see where the problem is at all," he said.

He added that there had been a misunderstanding. Contrary to what he had said during the interview — ("Sciyo was founded in Vienna in 2004 as In-Tech. In 2008 we moved our headquarters to Croatia to cut down on operating costs. In November the company changed its name to Sciyo" ... Sciyo and In-Tech are the same company."); contrary to what the company's press release of 20th November 2009 said ("Effective today, In-Tech is changing its name to Sciyo and continues publishing using a new website, sciyo.com ... The company ownership and management remain unchanged"); contrary to what it says on Sciyo's web site; and contrary to what its Scribd company backgrounder says — Lazinica now insisted that Sciyo is not in fact the same company as In-Tech.

"Sciyo is a new Open Access publisher," he said. "Sciyo has no publications yet; the first Sciyo book will be published in May/June this year. So how does anyone know anything about the Sciyo review process?"

He continued: "Sciyo has taken all In-Tech publications, which without doubt have high scientific quality (which can be seen by the number of readers); Sciyo has a different strategy and development policy than In-Tech."

He concluded: "We were aware of In-Tech's process disadvantages, and Sciyo has improved the services and processes which were inherited from In-Tech."

Sutton, however, emailed me to say that she stood by her earlier quote. She added: "We have taken Sciyo's name off of the OASPA website, and have asked Sciyo to remove the 'member of OASPA' logo from their site. OASPA has asked Sciyo to apply for membership at which time we will be reviewing carefully their practices and policies. Sciyo has agreed to apply for membership."

Let's hope that this matter can be settled to the satisfaction of both OASPA and Sciyo: that OASPA finds Sciyo's practices and policies sufficient to warrant membership, and that the publisher is therefore able to put OASPA's logo back on its web site.

We are, however, left with two questions:

- Did not OASPA review In-Tech's practices and policies carefully prior to accepting it as a member of the organisation in the first place?

- In the light of this comment posted on the Web a month after In-Tech became Sciyo, how confident can we be that Sciyo's bulk emailing activities are any different from those of In-Tech?

Aleksandar Lazinica, CEO, Sciyo

The interview begins...

RP: On 18th December last year you sent me a press release stating that starting this year authors publishing with Sciyo will receive royalties based on the number of downloads their publications receive. What were your reasons for introducing royalties, and why do you think authors might find the idea attractive?

AL: It seemed appropriate to provide some form of acknowledgement to our authors. They are the ones bringing the greatest value to the table when it comes to academic publishing and we wanted to reward the ones whose work is particularly useful to the academic community.

We felt that our authors would appreciate this merit-based system, particularly because we operate under the 'author pays' model. Although our publication charges are among the lowest in the open access publishing industry, and in most cases get covered by the author's institution, the royalties are accredited to the author directly. Also, they are independent of the publication fee, which means they can offset or even exceed the fee.

RP: Could one perhaps argue that if it is the author's institution that pays the APC then it is the institution that should receive the royalties. Is that a viable argument do you think?

AL: Institutions are not at the top of the financial pyramid either. Following this argumentation, you could say that the money should go to taxpayers and continue on by saying that any prize awarded to any scientist has to be given to those who supported his or her work.

RP: Sciyo publishes both books and journals and, as you say, it is an OA publisher that charges a 470 euro article processing charge ([APC](#)). However this charge is only levied on book chapters, not journal articles right?

AL: That is correct. As of the beginning of this year, all our journals operate on a 'free for all' basis — both for the authors and the readers. In 2010, therefore, the journals will be subsidised from the article processing charges levied on our books.

RP: And are royalties only paid on book chapters?

AL: Correct. The royalties apply to Sciyo's book editions. Since there are no publication charges for journal articles, and no journal subscriptions, there are no royalties either.

RP: Can we look at the details of these royalty payments. The press release said that for every 10 downloads, 0.2 euro will be paid to authors on an annual basis, and that: "Author royalties will be accredited directly to the author's account, with the exception of royalties under 100 euro, which will be deducted from the author's publishing fee the next time he or she decides to publish with Sciyo". You said that the money used to pay royalties on book chapters comes from the publication charges. There is no other revenue stream then?

AL: At this point, article processing charges levied on the book chapters we publish are the only source of revenue. The new model was designed to provide a transition towards alternative revenue streams, which will enable us to provide a 'free for all' model for all our publications.

We are currently considering several alternatives to the article processing charges and once we are positive that we can secure the long term sustainability of our publications through alternative sources, we will be making the next step. We strongly believe that the APC has no future. So this is a transition model from subscription-based to free publications.

RP: The press release also said that one aim is to "reward high quality academic work deemed most useful by the research community." Is there yet any evidence to suggest that the royalty payments are increasing either the number or the quality of the submissions you receive?

AL: It is too early to tell. We are currently in the process of accepting the first submissions since the model was introduced and we expect to have the numbers in a few months.

When it comes to the quality of submissions, the research community will be the only arbiter. Members of the research community will be the ones doing the post-publication quality evaluation by using the work. The assumption is that the more the work is used, the higher its value for the scientific community, and so its quality.

The aim of the royalties is not to increase the number of submissions. Book chapter authors have to invest a substantial amount of time and effort in their work and we believe it is appropriate to reward them for their valuable contribution. This system also allows each chapter to be evaluated and rewarded independently. Royalty payments and the quality of the submissions cannot be correlated.

RP: As you says, it is early days, but how much have you budgeted to pay out in royalties in 2010? Also how much money do you think an academic author would be able to make from royalties on the kind of work that Sciyo publishes?

AL: The first authors to receive royalties will have their work published in May this year. Since the royalties are paid on an annual basis, the first payment will take place in May 2011.

Our most downloaded publications so far have received over 6,000 downloads. An author of such a publication would receive around 120 euro in royalties. However, we expect a significant increase in the number of downloads this year.

RP: Does not paying by downloads invite abuse? If you were an author who had published in a Sciyo book, would you not download your chapter a zillion times, and encourage your friends to do so as well?

AL: We thought of that, of course. Our development team has designed a reliable system which will prevent such attempts. Without going into specific details, abuse will be virtually impossible.

That said we will encourage authors to disseminate their work and make it visible to the relevant audience. After all, wide dissemination of research findings is in the best interest of the research community.

Marketing

RP: Yes, I notice in your press release you said: "Over the previous year, Sciyo's publications have received over 720,000 downloads. Since the company's publishing platform expects a rapid growth in 2010, the number of downloads is expected to increase accordingly. To take full advantage of the incentive and maximise the number of downloads, each author will receive a comprehensive information pack prior to online publication outlining strategies they can use to promote their work." Essentially you are asking authors to do their own marketing are you?

AL: Not exactly. Many of our authors are not aware of the possibilities of increasing the potential readership of their own work and we're here to help them. We will be encouraging them to take full advantage of these options, since this benefits them as well as us. The impact of a piece of academic work depends largely on its readership. The online environment is a democratic space, allowing anyone with some basic knowledge to increase his or her readership. It is changing the ways in which science is disseminated.

RP: So the idea is to get researchers to market their own papers. I have spoken to several of your authors, and I did not form the impression that they want royalties, or relish the idea of marketing their own papers. For instance, one commented to me: "As a researcher in favour of open access to information (papers, software, hardware, ...) I have to say that I do not like the idea of getting royalties very much. I do not think this would be for the benefit of the authors but of the journal. It pushes authors to advertise their work (as if it were perfume in Harrods) in order to receive a small amount of money. The journal will receive more visits and therefore it will be ranked in the best places of the scientific community." Is this not likely to

be a typical response?

AL: We appreciate feedback from our authors but the comment is probably a reaction based on a wrong assumption: "*So the idea is to get researchers to market their own papers.*" No. We are giving them a set of simple tools to explore the possibilities of making their work more visible to interested readers. Isn't the whole point of publishing research findings to make them accessible to the research community? The entire Open Access movement is focused on increasing accessibility. The effort authors wish to put into this is entirely up to them, it is not mandatory or necessary.

As an example, it might consist of linking their papers to their home institutional repository system. This may be mandatory in the US, but there are countries with different regulations. Marketing the work we publish is our job.

As I say, I fail to see how improved ranking of the journal isn't beneficial for the author who published in it. I'd also have to disagree with the claim that this is a typical response. Authors supportive of Open Access and familiar with the 'author pays' model will see this as a welcome incentive they can take advantage of if they want to.

RP: Let me ask the question in a different way: What is in it for Sciyo to pay royalties? Increased downloads, thus increased citations and eventually an [impact factor](), presumably?

AL: Of course, one of the aims of the model is to boost the visibility of our publishing platform. We are hoping this will eventually enable us to create alternative streams of revenue and abandon the author-pays system.

RP: Can you say more about the new streams of revenue you anticipate?

AL: We are currently exploring different options but for now we are not able to offer any details. We are basing our future development on the assumption that in the online environment the number of eyeballs is what counts and that people using a particular service do not necessarily have to be the ones paying for it. As soon as we're ready, we will be sharing the specifics with the community.

Business model

RP: There seems to be some scepticism within the OA movement about the sustainability of the business model that Sciyo says it is adopting.

AL: I can see why there might be some concerns regarding the sustainability of the model, since there have always been concerns regarding the sustainability of Open Access in general as well as different ways of financing it. However, let me just remind you that our journals already operate on a free for all basis and we charge publication fees only for the books.

Regardless, we will not be calling off the publication charges on our book chapters until we're absolutely certain that we can ensure the sustainability of our publications through alternative streams of revenue. Of course, we welcome any feedback from the community and we are open for discussion regarding any concerns you mention.

RP: I am told that a few publishers have previously tried to attract authors by paying royalties for journal articles, but my understanding is that nearly all of these attempts have failed to have enough of an impact on submissions to justify the cost. Were you not deterred by that?

AL: An increase in submissions is not the objective of the royalties. However, royalties below 100 euro won't be paid directly but rather deducted from the publishing fee the next time the author publishes with Sciyo. We believe this will encourage more authors to publish with us on multiple occasions, so in that sense we do expect the number of submissions to increase. The quality will also rise since only authors with a high number of downloads will keep going.

RP: I am wondering if perhaps you hope to emulate the model of [Medknow](), which sells [print subscriptions]() alongside no-fee OA full-text online. Essentially print subscriptions pay all the publication costs, but the content is free on the Web. I note, for instance, that the print version of the International Journal of Advanced Robotic Systems is [listed]() on Amazon.com as having an annual subscription of $600.79. I think Hindawi charges $195 for print subscriptions to its journals, and PLoS Biology charges $160. Perhaps that price is designed to provide Sciyo with a useful additional revenue stream?

AL: From 2004 to 2009 the subscription charge for the *International Journal of Advanced Robotic Systems* was 380 euro.

In 2009, we switched from subscription-based model to the 'authors pays' model and introduced the industry's lowest article processing charges of 100 euro for the first 6 pages and 20 euro for each subsequent page. However, the fee was still a barrier for authors from developing countries. And from our point of view the revenue was very low when the cost of managing the payments was taken into account (bank transfers, accounting, VAT, etc).

As I said, we have discontinued the article processing charges this year. This means that the *International Journal of Advanced Robotic Systems* is the first ISI listed journal free for authors and readers. There are no subscription or article processing charges.

The second change we have made is to switch to online only publications. The logic here is that what makes the publication valuable is its content, not its physical form. Electronically produced content consists of bits. The price of bits is close to zero and there is a strong tendency towards copying electronic content. The combination of both these things is impossible with the print format as we know it today.

Many of us enjoy hard copy books and journals and they will always have collector's value but they might disappear faster then we think. Models combining subscription based print and free online access are not the best way to survive. Is it reasonable to charge a subscription fee on the content you can find online for free?

Google, the standardisation of e-reader devices, and social media are rapidly changing the publishing industry. It's interesting to look at how free news content changed the newspaper industry. There are many signs that we can expect a process of rapid change in academic publishing too. Open Access is a remarkable idea, but we at Sciyo believe that the 'author pays' open access model is only a transitional phenomenon as we move to a 'free for all' model.

Another big difference between Sciyo and other OA publishers is that our book authors — who

are still paying the APC — receive hardcopies of the books in which their chapters are published by priority mail, and at no cost. This is included in the cost of the APC.

In other words, each corresponding author receives a free hard cover copy of his or her bound book, sent to his/her postal address, within 15 days of publication date. You mentioned PLoS and Hindawi. They are charging APCs and then selling the hardcopies. So if I am the author I should pay the APC and then pay for the hardcopy? Is that fair?

As for Amazon listing a price for the print copy of an online-only journal, that is a question to put to Amazon.

RP: Can we talk about numbers. In the company backgrounder you sent to me with the press release it says that you publish over 100 books a year. The Sciyo web site implies there are only 100 books in total. Am I misunderstanding something?

AL: No. At the moment you can find 84 books. Approximately 30 books will be released fairly soon and another 100 in about two months.

RP: The backgrounder also says that you have published over 3,000 scientific articles. However, the web site only contains three journals, and together they appear to have published no more than around 300 articles. Can you clarify that?

AL: As far as we are concerned scientific articles are conference papers, journal articles, book chapters and other forms of printed scientific communication. So that number includes book chapters as well as journal articles.

In the 21st century, in the new "internet world", it is no longer important if an article is published in a journal, a book or as conference proceedings. The future will consist of big scientific databases composed of many "articles". The article is the most important part of scholarly communication; it consists of information; and information is the most valuable thing in this new world.

When you go on sciyo.com and search on the scientific term you are interested in using our search box, for example, you get a list of search results. At that point you are not concerned whether the article you are interested in is a part of a journal, a book or conference proceedings, right? What matters is that you should find the information you are looking for.

Ownership

RP: Can we talk about ownership. Who owns Sciyo, and where are its corporate headquarters located?

AL: Sciyo is owned by Vedran Kordić and me, with headquarters in Rijeka, Croatia. Vedran and I met at the [Vienna University of Technology](#), [Institute of Production Engineering](#), where we have both worked as scientists in the field of mobile robotics. In 2004, we started the *Journal of Advanced Robotic Systems*, which was the company's starting point.

RP: Which started life as a subscription journal didn't it?

AL: Yes, it started out as subscription based journal (print edition) and a free online edition. In 2009 the model was switched to 'author pays' open access and from 2010 to free for all. And as I said, from 2010 all Sciyo journals will be published online only.

RP: Sciyo used to be a Vienna-base company called In-Tech didn't it?

AL: You are correct. Sciyo was founded in Vienna in 2004 as In-Tech. In 2008 we moved our headquarters to Croatia to cut down on operating costs. In November, the company changed its name to Sciyo. We feel that the new name better reflects the direction we're taking towards developing an online scientific community alongside our publishing activities.

RP: What does the word Sciyo imply?

AL: Sci in Sciyo points to science whereas yo is meant to reflect a more open and modern approach to academic publishing focused on the authors.

RP: What else changed apart from the location and the name?

AL: In-Tech was a small business driven by the spirit and capacity of its two founders. Sciyo now consists of 21 employees and a number of associates.

RP: It seems a little confusing that there is still an In-Tech [web site](#) apparently operating in parallel with the Sciyo site, and which appears still to be based in Austria. This gives the impression that Sciyo and In-Tech are separate operations. Can you say more about the relationship between Sciyo and In-Tech, and their respective web sites?

AL: Sciyo and In-Tech are the same company. We are maintaining [intechweb.org](#) during a transitional period, since a large number of our authors are still in the publishing process and the old manuscript tracking system is still in use. In a few months intechweb.org will be discontinued and will point to the new web domain. This is a substantial loss but we have to cut it and switch on the easier, shorter — and hopefully more cheerful — domain name sciyo.com.

RP: I note that In-Tech lists four journals (the [Journal of Advanced Robotic Systems](#), the [Journal of Humanoids](#), the [International Journal of Cyber-Physical Systems](#), and [International Journal of Engineering Business Management](#). Sciyo lists only three of the journals. Why?

AL: The *International Journal of Cyber-Physical Systems* has been discontinued.

RP: I see only two of your journals are listed in the DOAJ (the [Advanced Robotic Systems](#) and the [Journal of Humanoids](#)), and they are listed as publications of In-Tech, not Sciyo. Is that an oversight on the part of the DOAJ?

AL: No, it is an oversight on our part.

RP: The Sciyo site lists the names of an [International Scientific Board](#) but not the officers of the company. Is the board the same for both Sciyo and In-Tech, and who are the company's officers?

AL: I believe you are referring to Sciyo's Scientific Advisory Board. Its role is to monitor and

advise Sciyo on its publishing strategy, and propose improvements. They are independent experts who have been selected based on their professional background.

RP: One of your authors pointed out to me that there is no editorial board listed on the web site, and no named editors or editors-in-chief. Is this not unusual for a scholarly journal publishing company?

AL: Possibly you mean that the books do not have editors displayed. It is true: the book editors' names are kept confidential to protect them in the chapter selection process. Different people, different idols. The same can be argued for the editor-in-chief positions.

For the *International Journal of Advanced Robotic Systems*, the editors-in-chief are Kordić and I. By the end of 2010 new editors-in-chief will be appointed, people who are experts in the field and who have the energy and ideas to move the journal on.

Spam?

RP: Can we look at the way in which you seek submissions? In 2007 it was drawn to my attention that members of the research community were expressing concern about invitations to submit book chapters that In-Tech was emailing out. When I contacted the company about this I received a reply from Vedran Kordić. He also referred to you, although I don't think I was ever told your official positions in the company. As you now say, however, you are the joint owners of Sciyo? But who are the officers of the company — the CEO, the Publisher etc. — and who is responsible for marketing at Sciyo?

AL: Yes. Dr. Kordić and I are the owners and managing directors of the company, and we have served in that capacity since the company was founded in 2004. We are also the company's officers. I am the CEO; Sciyo is the publisher. We are currently on the lookout for one publishing and one marketing advisor with a background in publishing.

RP: I note that as recently as last March that researchers were still reacting negatively to the invitations they were receiving from In-Tech (And here). Sciyo's marketing activities seem to be being greeted with similar scepticism under its new name — with many inclined to view the emails that are being sent as out as little more than spam. These invitations are apparently signed by Vedran Kordić, and they appear to be part of what one might call a "cold-calling" process. As such, it would seem fair to call them spam invitations. As you may know, these kinds of activities are quite a sensitive issue for the OA movement, with some arguing that such invitations fall foul of national anti-spam legislation. Do you think perhaps the company ought to re-think its marketing strategy?

AL: Every conference, and a number of well known publishers (classical and OA) also use this method to inform potential authors about their products. Are these calls also spam? This is the normal way of engaging in scientific communication. I receive many calls from reputable scientific organisations on a daily basis. So, this is a question of personal perception: what is for one person spam to another isn't. We are receiving a whole variety of responses regarding this issue. We are hearing these people, their input is relevant.

RP: I think you are saying that spam is in the eye of the beholder and that you are not doing anything that other publishers are not doing. In fact, there are legal definitions of spam, or what legislators tend to call unsolicited bulk email. A number of countries have outlawed this,

*including in the UK with the [UK Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations 2003](#)
and New Zealand with the Unsolicited Electronic Messages Act ([UEMA](#)). These laws
generally state that commercial electronic messages must not be sent unless the receiver has
first consented to receive them. This suggests to me that cold calling by email in the way that
you do is in some countries illegal. Would you agree?*

AL: Of course there is a legal definition of a spam. We are not doing anything illegal. Is sending
the press release you received spam or not depending on your perception and value of the
information written in the email?

Please look at my answer to your previous question once again more carefully. Nowadays spam
filters are efficient, so I believe the question of spamming had great importance and weight some
years ago, but not today, and especially not in the future.

*RP: Sciyo is a member of the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association ([OASPA](#)). I am
conscious that OASPA was created in response to the way in which some publishers were
seeking submissions from researchers by using unsolicited bulk email. OASPA says that one
of its missions is to "Promote a uniform definition of OA publishing, best practices for
maintaining and disseminating OA scholarly communications, and ethical standards." Are
you confident that your emailing activities conform to the ethical standards expected of
OASPA members?*

AL: All Sciyo's activities conform to OASPA's ethical standards. Our author database to date
consists of a respectable number of registered members. These are informed about Sciyo
activities on regular basis.

Peer review

RP: How does peer review work at Sciyo?

AL: Sciyo applies double-blind peer review, keeping both the identities of the peer reviewers
and the authors hidden in order to protect the integrity of the process.

*RP: So the review process isn't open? It isn't possible to see manuscripts going through the
review process in the [transparent manner](#) of the BMC series?*

AL: Our manuscript tracking system allows the authors to see what stage of the process their
manuscript has reached. Authors are notified of the results once the review is over. When it
comes to books, only articles requiring little or no modifications are accepted for publication,
due to the nature of the publishing process. Journal authors receive standard reviewer reports
with required modifications and a deadline for resubmission attached, after which they receive
notification of acceptance or rejection.

*RP: One of your authors whom I contacted — who has published three book chapters with
you, and one journal article, and who wishes not to be named — emailed me this comment
about his experiences: "The review process is blind, but it is actually non-existent. We never
received any real review for our papers, rather just an acceptance note for an initial abstract.
The full papers were not reviewed at all and, furthermore, for some papers we did not have a
chance for proof reading. Finally, two articles of ours were published without notifying us at
all, in one case (the journal) the initially submitted draft was taken as it was and suddenly*

appeared on the web some months later (I just accidentally noticed this publication when I searched the web). I do not know how their review process works internally, but from what I experienced and heard from others, I fear, in comparison to all other publishers/journals/books I have experiences with, In-Tech/Sciyo ... well, I cannot even begin to compare it. It is simply highly unprofessional."

When I asked him if his claim about the lack of proper review was based on supposition or definite knowledge he replied: "Please note that the acceptance notifications we received were only done on the basis of an initial one-page-abstract so, in fact none of the full submissions were reviewed, because after abstract submission there simply was no further iteration loop for quality control." How do you respond to that?

AL: Admittedly, consistency in peer review is our Achilles heel and it is also one of our priorities in 2009/10. We do not have a bullet proof review system yet. We have managed to improve the process a lot but there is still an unacceptably high deviation in the quality between the publications.

The model similar to BMC may be adopted in order to improve the transparency of the process.

The review process is the most problematic issue for academic publishers. In short, we can call it reviewer overload. There are publishers which publish 300,000 articles per year with rejection rate of 30%. The review should be done by experts in the field, but my question is: how many high quality reviewers do they need and do they have them at all?

For example, I was invited to be the reviewer of some "high" quality journals published by Elsevier and Springer in fields where I don't have clue. So, I was supposed to review articles written by people who know 1,000 times more than me in that field. Again, my question is: what is the purpose of such reviews, other than to be seen to be abiding by some formal regulations? Scientific publishing today is still at the same level as it was in the 19th century, with journals and the review process still the main parts of it. After more than 100 years, I believe it's time to move on and apply new mechanisms. Readers are the ones who should review the article by reading it or not.

On the other hand, a large part of our publishing activities involves publishing scientific books. Here the review process consists of two steps: 1. Selecting chapters based on the chapter abstract and 2. A final quality check upon receipt of the full chapter. Only material which can be published without or with small corrections can be accepted for publishing. All other material is rejected. There is a difference in requirements and review process between journal papers and book chapters.

RP: You seem to be saying that the failure to review the papers of the author I cited was due to a failure of your reviewers. It seemed clear to me, however, that the author saw it as a failure on the part of Sciyo to send his work out for proper review. As he put it, "None of the full submissions were reviewed."

AL: We cannot comment on what "somebody" said. Please refer to what I said about the review problem in scholarly publishing in my previous answer.

RP: I don't see any copyright notices on your journal articles (perhaps I missed them). Presumably the works should have [Creative Commons Attribution License](#) attached to them?

AL: All of the material at sciyo.com is published under Creative Commons Attribution License. The link to the license is available in the website footer. We will make this fact more visible immediately.

RP: And presumably authors are able to self-archive their final peer-reviewed papers in their institutional repository, or a central service like arXiv or PubMed Central, at the time of publication?

AL: Of course, authors retain full copyright in their work and they are able to use and distribute it in any way they choose, as long as the source is properly attributed.

RP: Can they self-archive the publisher's pdf?

AL: Yes.

Journals have no future

RP: Royalties aside, how does Sciyo distinguish itself from other OA publishers? Why would an author choose Sciyo over another OA publisher?

AL: To date, over 10,000 scientists have published with us, mainly within the fields of robotics, artificial intelligence, operations research, manufacturing, and advanced technologies.

The fact that our publishing fee is among the lowest in the open access industry and that our authors have the option of extending their work with multimedia at any point after the publication, free of charge, is also a big factor.

RP: That's right, researchers can also add video can't they?

AL: Yes, and recently we introduced live author support too. This increases the efficiency, communication quality and the speed of the publication process. In fact, we are the first academic publisher to have appointed a dedicated staff member to be at the disposal of authors.

So we are positioning Sciyo as a scientific social network with an open access publishing service. As I've already said, academic publishing is at the 19th century level: Sciyo will become the first global academic publisher of the 21st century.

The recent trend of issuing several shorter publications per research leads to a fragmentation of the research findings. Such practice makes it difficult for the interested reader to retrieve and grasp the entire research output of the given research project. For this reason it is essential that we contribute to the density of scientific research by publishing the broader perspective of our research in one place. Sciyo provides such a space, together with the option to extend the articles with video, audio, PPTs, PDFs and a discussion forum allowing authors to create a media rich central point for their work.

RP: Can you expand on that?

AL: By that I mean following:

- Sciyo is entirely based on the new dynamic internet world
- Sciyo will become both an academic publishing and a community platform.
- Sciyo believes that "journals" have no future, and the article is the most important component. This means that scientific databases are the future,
- Sciyo is oriented to young scientists who have a totally different view of the world; they are born with the internet and the digital camera at their fingertips, and we should focus on them and offer them the services they want.

RP: What's the appeal of Sciyo to librarians in your view?

AL: For one, we offer a large number of resources in the aforementioned disciplines, as well as a growing collection of online videos, giving a multimedia dimension to the published research. Each page at sciyo.com features a search function making it easy for libraries to link to our database. Of course, there are no restrictions in using the material published by Sciyo so we encourage libraries to link to our site.

RP: How do you see Sciyo developing in the future?

AL: Apart from developing the new business model we are planning on entering new scientific disciplines and starting several new journal titles this year. Also, we will be putting significant effort into developing our online scientific community.

One idea is to make a database of free textbooks and tutorials, similar to MIT OpenCourseWare project. The content we are offering now is not of great interest to undergraduate students. One of our goals, however, is to motivate undergraduates to join and actively use Sciyo resources.

RP: Can you say something more about the scientific community you hope to build?

AL: The community is envisioned as a welcoming environment for anyone with an interest in science, a place where curious minds can connect, share ideas and discuss research findings. Right now it consists mainly of our authors, featuring their professional and personal profiles, but anyone is welcome to join. Near future plans include free open access video conferencing and a blogging platform for users.

RP: Thank you for taking the time to do this interview.