

A Guide to Creating

Community-Controlled

Science Journals



DECLARING INDEPENDENCE

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DECLARING INDEPENDENCE

DECLARING INDEPENDENCE is published by SPARC (the Scholarly Publishing & Academic Resources Coalition) and TRLN (the Triangle Research Libraries Network), partners in bringing this initiative to the research community.

SPARC is an international alliance of over 200 college and research libraries building a more competitive scholarly communication marketplace to address the high cost of information. It was created as an initiative of the Association of Research Libraries. TRLN is a collaborative organization of Duke University, North Carolina Central University, North Carolina State University, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, which through cooperative efforts marshals the financial, human and information resources of its libraries to create a rich knowledge environment that furthers the universities' teaching, research and service missions. TRLN member libraries are: the Perkins Library System, Fuqua School of Business Library, School of Law Library, and Medical Center Library at Duke University; the NCSU Libraries at North Carolina State University; the James E. Shepard Memorial Library and the Law Library at North Carolina Central University; and the Academic Affairs Library, Health Sciences Library, and Law Library at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

For further information: www.arl.org/sparc/DI

DEAR COLLEAGUE:

Please join me in **DECLARING INDEPENDENCE** from publishers and journals that do not serve the research community.

We scientists *can* exercise control of our journals. We can transform them from commercial commodities back to instruments of service to education and research. When we are in control, we fulfill our responsibility to ourselves, to society, to our institutions, and to our colleagues throughout the world.

In recent times, purely commercial interests have gained sway over too many of the journals that we depend on for research information. Maximizing profits has become the controlling goal. A system that should serve us is at the mercy of corporate acquisitions and profit-oriented planners. Disseminating scholarly research seems to be an afterthought.

I speak from first-hand experience of what happens when profits take over. In 1986, I started a journal in the field of evolutionary ecology. The initial subscription price was \$35 per year for individuals, \$100 for libraries. Within a twelve-year period, during which the journal changed ownership twice, the price for libraries had grown to nearly \$800 per year, an average annual increase of 19%.

I did the math. I estimated that my publisher pocketed profit of between \$170,000 and \$220,000 annually, a mark-up of about 275% and a profit margin of nearly 75%. After the second change in ownership, my editorial board

and I launched our own independent, competitive journal, *Evolutionary Ecology Research*.

Using common sense and prudent management, we have been able to set reasonable prices, use technology to speed up the review and publication process, and attract the leading lights of the field to our new journal.

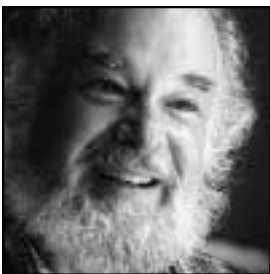
We did it, and you can too. Though I would not recommend our strategy to everyone, there *are* alternatives to commercial publication. You can start by reviewing this handbook to determine whether your journal serves the needs of its community. If it does not, you can use the handbook to explore and evaluate alternatives to your present situation.

We scientists are naturally curious explorers. Please be curious about the way your journal is run. And if you don't like what you find, explore ways of **DECLARING INDEPENDENCE**.



Michael L. Rosenzweig
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Michael L. Rosenzweig

DEAR JOURNAL EDITOR:

The challenge of reforming scientific communication — in which you play the central role — is no different from the problems you solve daily in the lab or in the field. There are data and hard evidence of effects to analyze.

The Data. During the last four years, the average cost of a commercially-published scientific journal has risen nearly 50%.

The Effect. College and research libraries, unable to keep pace with these rising costs, are canceling journals and diverting increasing amounts of the acquisitions budget to cover the cost of those remaining.

In the publication explosion of the past few decades, commercial firms have found there was profit to be made in the valuable service of publishing research journals. Scholars, in need of promotion and tenure, were happy to publish in the commercial journals — especially when the alternative was not being published at all — and gave their research papers away to journals free of charge.

A few commercial publishers discovered that the easiest way to increase profits was to raise subscription prices and, moreover, that the fattest profits came from raising library subscription prices aggressively and relentlessly. Institutional subscribers, accounting for the lion's share of the revenue supporting publication of journals in most fields, paid the price — reluctantly and with increasing difficulty — because their users demanded access.

With this foot in the door, these few commercial publishers built substantial portfolios of journals, aided by the trend of scholarly societies outsourcing their journals to commercial firms. The high profits from these journals have funded wave upon wave of acquisitions and consolidations among publishers, and often these profits are diverted out of scientific activities into unrelated lines of business in order to “enhance shareholder value.”

The results are clear: high prices, declining circulation, inefficient production schedules, and, in many cases, lack of responsiveness to editors, editorial boards, and authors. **But you and your colleagues can change this.**

As you know, every experiment derives from a hypothesis. SPARC's hypothesis is that high-impact, low-cost scientific journals — published by societies, university presses, or independent publishers — can provide researchers with prestigious alternatives to expensive commercial journals. SPARC partners have proven that with high-quality, reasonably priced alternatives to journals that no longer serve the community of scholars well. At the same time, SPARC members pledge support for SPARC-sponsored publications. This winning formula has given scientists new, responsible outlets for publishing their research and a good chance of financial viability over the long term.

DECLARING INDEPENDENCE is your guide to addressing the scientific communication crisis. It provides tools for evaluating your present situation and for evaluating publishing alternatives, as well as an approach to assessing those options.

Only you can determine the path that best suits you and your field. If you decide that **DECLARING INDEPENDENCE** is your path, SPARC is here to support you.



Rick Johnson
SPARC Enterprise Director