PeerJ’s AIM: Make “Open” Accessible for All

Wayfinders #2: building equity from a ‘per-publication charge’ context

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Brief History of PeerJ

- Launched in 2012 as a **fully Open Access** Publisher
- Mission-driven, PeerJ is committed to removing barriers to participation in science communication
- Launched with non-publication model:
  - Personal Lifetime Memberships
  - One-time payment, lifetime publishing rights
  - Too radical, or too complicated
  - Introduced APC in response to user demand and expectation
Context for today

● Equity is multi-faceted, and I can’t speak to all of those facets today
● The model I am discussing does not address all facets of equity
● My focus for today: removing the “per-publication” charge as a significant barrier to equitable participation

Elements I hope to touch on:

● Key reasons for introducing a new publishing model
● First steps in designing and implement that model
● Data helps guide decisions - but so can your mission
● Pitfalls, obstacles and key learnings
Our survey says...

Trends from authors surveyed after free publishing offers in 2022

Authors who want to publish OA but have no funding
   Any price to publish is too high
   The vast majority of these authors were in the Global South

Authors who want - or have - to publish OA but for whom cost is an insignificant concern
   In almost all cases, the journals they were intending to submit to:
   ● Had higher APCs
   ● Many were hybrid
   ● Around 50% had lower Impact Factors
   ● Almost all of these authors were from the Global North
   ● Journals were more subject/community specific

Authors who had no imperative or inclination to publish OA and would have chosen a paywalled journal
   Mixture of geographies, similar alternative journal profiles
Our survey says...

1. Price is a primary decision-driver when choosing where to publish
2. It’s not the level of price, it’s the existence of a price

If we want everyone to choose OA, we have to eliminate price as a barrier and payment as a burden.

If we want to fund access to participation for everyone we need to remove that barrier and burden for everyone.

We should aim for a model where collectively we can fund the costs of participation and access.
Our mission says...

When PeerJ launched we listed four key tenets:

#1 - We will help to make all academic publishing Open.

#2 - We will innovate in everything we do.

#3 - We will serve academia.

#4 - We will do all of the above at a minimal cost to the creators, and zero cost to the consumers of academic content. At the end of the day, we want to get to a position where it is free to publish, as well as free to read, all academic output. With the help of the academic community, we believe we will get there.
AIMs - Annual Institutional Memberships

- Launched in May 2023
- Features of AIMs:
  - Unlimited publishing for authors affiliated with member institutions
  - Authors can choose OA and not have to worry about paying a fee
  - They can be confident that if their institution is a member when they submit they will not face an APC
  - Opportunity to reduce price as a barrier for authors, and reduce administrative costs and per-unit burden for all parties involved
- First step towards a model of collective action
  - Psychologically disassociate per-publication cost and OA
  - Find and engage with partners and contributors who share our values and mission
  - Opportunity to explore active contributions to support participation for all
Modelling the model

What’s working for other people?

- Market trends - other publisher models

Who is willing and able to pay?

- What do those people want from a model?

What’s your place in the market?

- As a smaller publisher, we are not a priority. The easier and simpler the model and commitment, the easier and simpler a decision for the purchaser

What’s manageable and scalable for our organisation? Where are their potential cost savings/efficiencies that can benefit us and the customer?
Modelling the model

Scrutinise data to unearth target partners - don’t make assumptions

Try to create a model that fairly accounts for your smallest customer and your largest customer; this is difficult, but you need to try to have a solution for everyone

Understanding your current customers’ needs and behaviours is difficult

Understanding the needs and behaviours of new/unknown customers is REALLY difficult

Build in some elasticity to modelling a transition; there’s a lot you can’t know until you start, so plan to be flexible
Two big lessons learned so far - 1

New models change behaviour, but not consistently

- Over the entire program, we have seen an uptick of submissions from member institutions
  - Institutions with a wide range of deals/author options - least change, as the author has the most options
    - Well-funded institutions
    - Lower cost per published paper
  - Institutions with few or no other deals - significant growth
    - Less-funded institutions
    - Higher cost per published paper

What are the implications for recalculating membership fee? How do we ensure affordability for the partner, and cost-effectiveness for us as a publisher?
Two big lessons learned so far - 2

Not everyone shares your vision:

● Some customers are happy with the status quo - they have no problem with paying APCs
  ○ Collectively we have set up an industry around APCs
  ○ People have been conditioned to associate OA with APCs, and the cost of participation with the article as a unit
● Some customers may not share your values: that equity is important, or possible, or their problem to help solve
● Some potential customers may see your model as an opportunity - and not always in a positive way
  ○ Planning, reporting and modelling for new customers is key
  ○ Due diligence for unknown potential partners is vital
What’s next for AIMs?

1. Onboarding new members

1. First renewals approaching

1. Launching a series of small, community-led, mission-driven APC-free journals - *Open Advances*