

Hacking solutions to science problems are springing up everywhere. But what about the publishing industry? Where are the TripAdvisors for journals submissions, the Deliveroo for laboratory reagents? Clearly there are so many opportunities technology could bring to radically change the lives of scientists that it is a bit difficult to know where to start. Yet, the debate on the future of scholarly publishing may be about changing the incentives for researchers rather than embracing smart technology solutions. Find out from the experts in the industry who gathered in Frankfurt a few weeks ago.



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Time for serious hacking solutions in scholarly publishing



Changing incentives to researchers and scientific-centric technology solutions could be the new normal

Hacking solutions to science problems are springing up everywhere. They attempt to remove bureaucracy and streamline research. But how many of these initiatives are coming from the science publishing industry? There is currently no TripAdvisor to the best journal for submission, no

Deliveroo for laboratory reagent delivery. How about a decentralised peer-review based on the [blockchain](#) certification principle? Today, the social media networks for scientists—the likes of ResearchGate, Academia.edu and Mendeley—have only started a timid foray into what the future of scholarly publishing could look like.

This topic was debated in front of a room packed with science publishing executives at the [STM conference](#), on 18th October 2016, on the eve of the Frankfurt Book Fair. Earlier that day, [Brian Nosek](#), executive director at the [Centre for Open Science](#), Charlottesville, Virginia, USA, gave a caveat about any future changes. He primarily saw the need to change the way incentives for scientist work so that, ultimately, research itself changes rather than technology platforms imposing change.

Yet, the key to adapting is “down to the pace of experiment,” said [Phill Jones](#), head of publisher outreach, at Digital Science, London, UK, which provides technology solutions to the industry. Jones advocates doing lots and lots of experiments to find solutions to better serve the scientific community. Indeed, “rapid evolution based on observed improvement is better than disruption for the sake of disruption,” agreed [John Connolly](#), chief product officer at Springer Nature, London, UK.

Adopting an attitude that embrace these experiments “is the biggest change that we [the scholarly publishing industry] need to embrace,” Jones concluded. To do so, “we need publishers to be a lot less cautious,” noted [Richard Padley](#), Chairman Semantico, London, UK, providing technology solutions to science publishers. “It is a cultural thing, publishers need to empower their organisation to use technology from the top down.”

So are the lives of scientists about to be changed? Arguably, yes. Resistance from proponents of the *status quo* may still arise. It may depend on the pace at which science publisher turn into technology service industry. The truth is “users want to see tools that are much more user-centred and less centred around publishers,” argued Connolly. However, “if you ask a scientists what they wanted [in the past], they would have said high impact factors articles,” said Phil Jones. “They thought this is what they wanted because there was no alternative,” Jones added, whereas: “they wanted to have higher impact of their research and have greater reach.”

Clearly, “if you are optimistic about publishers, there is a job for publishers, to synthesise knowledge, to see the relevant content,” said Connolly. This means taking quite a lot of adjustment to those who pay for content. A download is not a marker of whether you have passed on that synthesised knowledge!

Sabine Louët, EuroScientist Editor.

Illustration credit: Toma Silinaite is a freelance illustrator, printmaker working and living in Kaunas, Lithuania. Feel free to say 'Hi!': toma.silinaite@gmail.com