

Strategy and Tactics to Create a Successful Medical Academic Journal

David Rew MA MChir FRCS
Consultant General Surgeon
University Hospital Southampton UK

Subject Chair for Medicine, SCOPUS Advisory Board 2009+

Former Editor in Chief, EJSO 2003 -2009
(The European Journal of Surgical Oncology)

The Key Ingredients of a Successful (Medical) Journal

The Vision (Why do it?)

The Audience (For Whom?)

The Editorial Team

The Publisher

The Resources (With What?)

The Process (How to?)

The Quality & Readability of the Product
Education as Entertainment
You are in the Competition for Attention Business

The Strategic Vision: Why publish an academic journal?

The traditional views

- To meet a need for authors, readers and a professional community (the target audience)
- To communicate information & knowledge to and for the target audience
- To ensure that the information is trustworthy and reliable (the work of the Editors and of the Peer Review process)
- To advance the reputation of the Editors, Publishers & of the sponsoring institution / society / organisation / Government

Meeting the need: Defining the target audience

- Specialist or general professional community?
- Geographic reach: who will want to read your content?
- Local (University or Specialist Society)/ Regional /National /International?
- Are those needs already met elsewhere?(Is it worth the effort?)
- How will the audience access your content (Internet, Print, in what Language?)
- What value will the audience place on your journal & its content?
- Who will pay the costs & how much are they willing to pay?
- If my journal did not exist, what difference would it make?

Is an academic Journal your best communication medium
for this content for this audience?

Other options include:

- Books and Book Series
- Conference Proceedings
- Newsletters & e-magazines
- Blogs
- Other forms of e-publishing and social media

What is your starting point as a Journal Editor?

An existing journal which is:

- - failing?
- - steady state?
- - expanding?

A journal which is underperforming to its potential:

- - to reach a wider audience?
- - to improve its manuscript flow?
- - to improve its quality and bibliometrics?

An idea for a new Journal

An academic journal as a business

- It must have sustainable sources of income to cover costs
- It must be run professionally, by the Publisher & the Editors
- It must have a long term plan & viability
- It must conform to laws & best practices
- It must provide a quality product which meets a need for the professional “consumer”

Thoughts on Publishers of Academic Journals

- A good publisher will help you to be successful
- Institutions /Universities /Societies & Individuals often act as self publishers
- Commercial publishers provide infrastructure & expertise in distribution
- Major international publishers support worldwide reach & influence
- Entry costs for e-publishers are now low -> proliferation of “pay to publish” & predatory publishers: poor quality but easy profits

How to become a good medical journal editor: it is difficult!

Attend a training course: if you can find one!

www.pspconsulting.org/medical-editors/ (Oxford UK)

European Association of Science Editors Publications & Courses

<http://www.ease.org.uk/>

Read widely around the subject: eg Websites of major publishers

www.elsevier.com/editors/tools-and-resources

Talk to experienced editors

The scope of a (Medical) Journal Editor's duties (1)

To understand:

- yourself, your motives, your time management & your own vision
- your relationship with your publisher
- your contract & your contractual obligations
- your audience & develop a vision for the journal to meet their needs
- the principles of quality & presentation in print & on line
- the needs of authors

The scope of an Editor's duties (2)

To understand:

- peer review principles & managing peer reviewers
- the role & functions of an effective Editorial Board
- publishers & electronic publication
- public responsibilities, legal & ethical issues
- modern communication systems, use of social media, blogs

The Pursuit of Quality in Academic Journals

- A clear vision for the meaning of Quality in your journal
- Publish original work
- Interesting, thought provoking, intellectually challenging
- In clear, simple language, with a clear title, abstract & conclusions
- “Less is more”: The least words and data
- Limit article length (3000 words), number of tables & references
- Rigorous editing; consider the reader at all times
- Editorial courage in decision making
- Content: what forms to include & omit (eg Case reports)

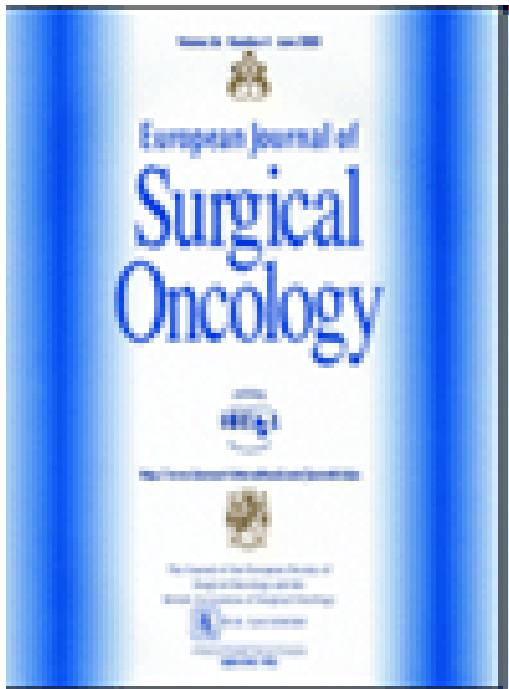
Finding original content for (medical) journals:

- The easy stuff has been done (repeatedly)
- Read widely: newspapers, general & specialist journals
- Think originally, laterally, & critically.
-
- Question every assumption & conventional wisdom: The herd usually stampedes in the wrong direction
-
- Technology provides huge opportunities for new intellectual approaches to old problems
- The future is in teamworking & large scale studies
- Truly original work & well conducted clinical trials will always find a place

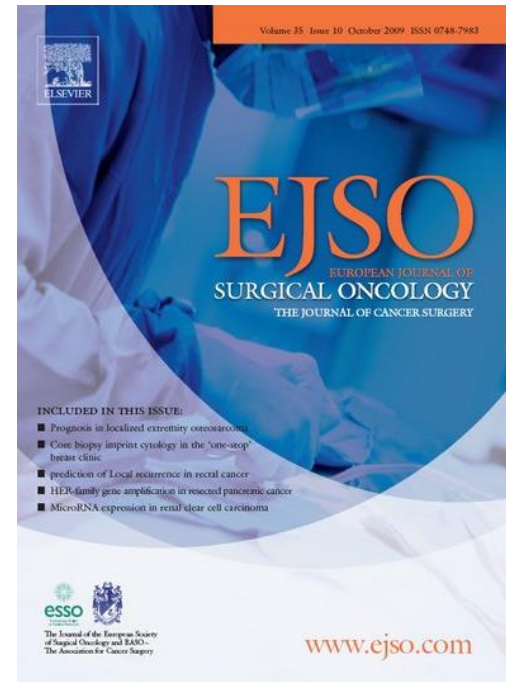
Thoughts on going International

- Brings your local & regional content to a worldwide audience
- Opens you to new readers & authors
- Opens you to international quality assurance systems, eg SCOPUS, WoS
- Benchmarks you against international standards & competition
- Obliges strategic thinking & review of your structure & processes
- Requires publishers to have appropriate skills & resources
- Requires a common language: Co-publication in English makes sense

My own experience as Editor in Chief of the European Journal of Surgical Oncology



2003



2009

My career in medical academic publication



- Graduate in Medicine, University of Cambridge, 1981
-
- Chosen career in General Surgery with research interests
- Appointed Associate Editor of the Eur J Surg Oncol 1996
- BMJ-Lancet Editors course 1997
- Deputy Editor 2000 to Professor Irving Taylor, my mentor
- Editor in Chief of the Eur J Surg Oncol, 2003 -2009
- Council Member, Committee on Publication Ethics, 2008 to 2010
- Medical Chair SCOPUS Content Selection Advisory Board 2009+

The European Journal of Surgical Oncology in 2002

- A Print journal of 2000 copies -> subscribers & libraries
- Joint ownership by Brit Assoc Surg Oncol & Eur Soc Surg Oncol.
- Limited regional circulation & no internet presence
- Regular change of publishers
- Low Impact Factor < 1.0
- Edited from a private office
- Six issues per annum
- Manual manuscript submission system

My vision for the Eur J Surg Oncol 2003

- A long term view (5 and ten years) to improve standards
- A strong, long term partnership with a major publisher
- A move to use the internet effectively
- A relentless focus on the quality of articles: a skill for turning poor manuscripts into readable content in excellent English
- Help, guidelines & constructive feedback for authors
- Imaginative & flexible use of reviewers:
- Progressive benchmarking against other surgical cancer journals, eg Brit J Surg, Surg Oncol, Arch Sur Oncol

A few measures of success for the Eur J Surg Oncol, 2003-2009

- Lasting contract with Elsevier Science, Oxford UK
- Internet distribution (Science Direct)
- Digital manuscript submission & editing system
- Doubling in publication frequency 6 – 12 issues
- Manuscript submissions up from 300 to >600 per year
- Wider subject cover (Neurosurgery, Gynaecology, Urology)
- Renewal of Editorial Board & Associate Editors
- Large reviewer database developed
- Impact Factor from <1.0 to -> 2.7
- 250,000 full article downloads 2009
- Journal thrives under successive editors with new ideas & strategies



Personal Reflections on Medical Journal Editorship

- A uniquely rewarding educational experience
- Justification for a clear and ambitious strategy
- Through a period of great technical change (from paper to digital)
- A lesson in people management (publisher, editorial board, authors)
- Not everyone will remain your friend! (eg Rejected authors)
- Insights into the cope & scale of publication fraud & malpractice
- The challenges of handing over and moving on (giving up the baby)

Journal Editorship in 2017: What is different today?

- The internet is now integral to our daily lives & processes
- Publication strategies are centred on-line rather than print
- But!: Paper remains a powerful communication medium
- Open Access & “Pay to Publish” have transformed (or undermined?) traditional academic publishing models – “a dark crazy world?”
- Altmetrics, social media, blogs, data archives & repositories
- We live in a world in which continuous radical change is normal
- The future of publishing is uncertain & an intellectual challenge for “would-be” Editors.