Google vs. the publishers

Last week we witnessed several events in the world of publishing that will affect AIP and its Member Societies. On Wednesday, October 29, much of the print, broadcast, and online news media ran stories on the following seemingly unrelated events: Google's agreement with publishers and authors concerning online access to books; a reorganization and consequent significant layoff of staff at Time Inc., the world's largest magazine publisher; and an announcement by the Christian Science Monitor to end its daily print edition.

There is a connection among these events to AIP's business—let's start with the Google settlement. The contentious issue was Google's much heralded and widely appreciated book scanning project, which began in 2004 in collaboration with several large research universities. Google's plan to upload the scanned books onto its online platform for full access worldwide was considered a noble goal for an organization that is now the world's largest information provider. Google was on safe ground with the scanning of books in the public domain. However, in 2005 the company became involved in a lawsuit filed by the publishers and authors of books that were still under copyright. The settlement reached last week appears to be a win-win arrangement for all of the parties. Google has agreed to a $125 million settlement, negotiated out of court, which will partially compensate authors and publishers of previously scanned copyrighted material. A significant portion of this fee will be used to set up a new online registry for access to scanned material. This registry will allow users to view without charge up to 20% of a scanned book and to view the entire book for a fee. Parties agreed to a revenue-sharing plan, with Google receiving 37% and the remainder going to the authors and publishers. If Google sells ads within this registry, the resulting revenue will be divided equally. This agreement gives readers access to a huge library of books, and it provides authors and publishers with appropriate recognition and compensation. For scientific publishers, such as AIP, that are struggling to meet increasing demands for online content and contending with pressures for open and free access, the Google agreement sets an important precedent by accommodating the desire for widespread online access and the need for fair compensation.

Regarding the developments at Time Inc. and the Christian Science Monitor, the decline of financial viability of newspapers and magazines in this country is disturbing. Professional news reporting by accredited journalists is being taken over by a cacophony of blogs on the Internet and 24-hour streamers on cable TV channels. Newspapers and magazines have not found a sustainable business model in the Internet era. The subscription and ad revenue from the disappearing print editions has not been replaced by comparable income in the digital editions, which give away the content and return far less ad revenue. If the peer-review system managed by scientific publishers were to disappear, the scientific community would lose its certification of scientific results. The lessons for scientific publishers are clear, following the line of the Google agreement. We must constantly strive to stay near the forefront of the Web technology that allows new ways to display and deliver our content to a wide audience. At the same time, the audience needs to value the content enough that the producers receive compensation via some combination of author, host institution, or reader fees.

This week

The AIP Executive Committee and Governing Board meet Wednesday and Thursday, respectively, in Naperville, Illinois, for their fall meeting to review and approve the 2009 budget. There will also be a retirement celebration for Jim Stith and Darlene Walters.

Thursday through Saturday, the 2008 Sigma Pi Sigma Congress will take place at Fermilab. With nearly double the anticipated attendance, we are pumped with excitement over the impending congress (and over the caffeine overdoses consumed to pull it off).

Sincerely,

Fred
Filling the role

Production Operations Support Services is pleased to welcome Phil Robertson to the position of production services support manager. In this role, Phil is responsible for the oversight of graphics production and support, staff development and training, production applications support, and CD/PDF production. Phil will also work closely with other members of the support staff, publishing technology, and production teams to see that projects are completed in a timely fashion.

Up for adoption

Adopt-a-Physicist, a program that connects high-school physics students to people with bachelor’s degrees or higher in physics via online discussion forums, has received a lot of good press lately. Through mentor–student relationships students learn about the educational backgrounds, careers, and lives of current physicists. Master’s degree candidate Andrew Zimmerman Jones wrote about the program and how important mentors can be in his blog, available at About.com. Julie K. Buzbee describes the impact the program is having on high-school students in Meridan, Kansas, in her article, "Students interact with physicists," which appeared online in the Topeka Capital-Journal. Fermilab Today covered the program in a feature article on October 22. Fermilab physicist David Harding, who participated as a mentor in an effort to make science and scientists more real to the students, said, "They may be able to think of themselves as possibly being scientists one day."

Many of the adopted physicists are members of the physics honor society, Sigma Pi Sigma, and many use their physics background in a wide variety of careers including those of engineer, science writer, and outreach coordinator. Adopt-a-Physicist is a service provided by Sigma Pi Sigma, in collaboration with the American Physical Society, the American Association of Physics Teachers, and ComPADRE.

Where art and history of science met

On the evening of Tuesday, October 28, members of the ACP community and the general public were treated to the semiannual ACP art exhibit reception, and a lecture and book signing by Spencer Weart, director of the Center for History of Physics. The art exhibit, entitled "In formation," featured the artwork of three local artists, Alan Binstock, Philip J. Gross, and Doris Colbert Kennedy. Their works were inspired by the constant metamorphosis of space and time and are intended to "penetrate the structural dynamics underlying what the naked eye can see."

Following gallery talks by the artists and the serving of refreshments, AIP’s own Spencer Weart gave a talk to commemorate the publication of his newly revised book, The Discovery of Global Warming (2008). Weart not only dissected the development of a consensus among the scientific community on the science of human-induced global warming, but also addressed the emergence of global warming as a social and political issue. Weart's lecture raised awareness of his book and the work of the Center for History of Physics.

The combined art exhibit and book signing was ACP's most successful art reception to date. The event attracted many ACP employees as well as dozens of members of the general public. The exhibit will
be displayed in the rotunda and first-floor hallways until April 17, 2009.

We invite your feedback to this newsletter via e-mail to aipmatters@aip.org.

For past issues of this newsletter, visit the AIP Matters archives.