

Scenario 3: Circulation and subscription management for print and online

Consider the following case history

The Society for Rare American Deer (SRAD) runs one small journal which is published quarterly. The circulation database is maintained in-house by one of the Member services administrative staff as an Excel spreadsheet on their office computer. The file is sent to the printer each quarter for them to run off the mailing labels. The journal is provided as a Member benefit and sold to institutions only as a bundled entity of print + online there is no separate print and online price. The society is interested in starting a pay-per-view option for the journal articles but is unsure about the technology for doing so and what implications this would have on current staff workloads. The current arrangement for responding to missing issue/claims requests involves a somewhat elaborate paper trail from the society to the printer who stores issues and will fulfill claims but this can take several weeks and often results in duplicate requests being fulfilled because of the slow response rate and especially so for non-domestic institutional subscribers. Online customer service is handled through an e-mail feedback form sent to an out-of-house freelance IT specialist and there is concern that these often urgent questions are languishing and that this reflects poorly on the society and the journal.

The bulk of the institutional subscriptions are from US institutions and the numbers have been falling over the past three years. The society believes it needs to do a more professional job of taking and renewing institutional subscriptions and responding promptly to customer service issues. In particular it seems important to be able to process subscriptions online in a number of key currencies (Euro and Yen at least) in order to support efforts the society is making to grow international subscriptions. It is planning a reciprocal partnership with the Society for Rare German Deer (DGTG) based in Stuttgart. So far the two societies have agreed to exchange circulation lists and allow each to promote to the others list.

In discussion with your group please answer the following points based on your and your group's combined experiences:

1. Should this publisher be seeking an outsourced solution to the various issues that are coming to the fore **or** are they *fixable* and *sustainable* within the current set of arrangements?
2. What information and questions must the society acquire from each supplier in assessing their suitability for circulation and subscription management for this societies' journal?
3. How much should the society expect to pay per institutional subscription per year for subscriber file maintenance and fulfillment?
4. How important is prompt and efficient customer service to maintaining and growing institutional circulation numbers?
5. How important is a seamless online subscription processing system – including pricing for multi-sites – to retaining and growing institutional loyalty to a single journal?
6. How would you judge the success of this outsourced solution 12 months after it was implemented?