

Scenario 4: Subscription marketing and sales of print and online journals

Consider the following case history

The Leukocyte Association (LA) publishes 3 monthly journals and until 2003 had a part-time freelance marketing specialist who planned and managed marketing of the (bundled) print and online versions of the journals. However due to budget cuts and the pressure this brought to bear on the Association, this freelance person had to be removed from the publishing budget for 2004 and 2005. Since then the subscription revenue for each of the titles has drifted down at a rate of 6-9% per year despite annual institutional price increases of 5-6% per year for each journal. Membership of the Association has also been falling as the Member services division used to rely on the freelance marketer in the publishing group to supply appropriate promotional copy and support for some of their key marketing efforts. The journals do not accept print advertising.

A careful analysis of publishing costs has shown that reducing the print runs for the journals would save money for the Association. It is therefore highly likely to 'unbundle' print from online in 2007 but is concerned about how to communicate this and how to implement a tiered pricing model for institutions. Member subscriptions in print in particular are priced too low and yet the Association feels it cannot risk antagonizing Members by increasing the price to cover the true costs. Institutional subscriptions outside the US are a small fraction of the total (~22%) and there is room to develop the journals business here.

The Publications Manager has been asked by the Association's Publications Committee to research options for an outsourced sales and marketing solution with groups that are willing and able to help recruit new Members especially internationally, to promote all 3 journals to Members and Institutions – nationally and internationally, and to provide innovative solutions to the problems this Association is facing.

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

1. What information and questions must the Publications Manager acquire from each supplier in assessing the suitability of each group as the future marketing and sales provider for this Association's Membership and journals? In particular what questions should be asked about their approach to marketing and sales into (a) Europe and (b) Asia?
2. What impact would removing print copies of the publications for Members have on the publishers in your group?
3. Will a small three- journal publisher inevitably lose institutional subscriptions as library budgets are consumed by larger purchases of journal collections?
4. How can they protect themselves from such a trend (in addition to being a BioOne publisher!)
5. How would you judge the success of this outsourced solution 12 months after it was implemented?