

CURRENT COMMENTS

The Agony and the Ecstasy of Publishing Your Own Book: *Essays of an Information Scientist*

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The idea of collecting all my "Current Comments®" into a book was first suggested to me about four years ago by Chauncey Leake. For some very practical reasons, it was an idea that had immediate appeal.

For one thing, it seemed like a convenient way of maintaining a complete set for my own use. After fifteen years of writing "Current Comments," my files of source materials and printed copies of the essays had begun to show gaps. Some people had borrowed but often forgot to return! Also, I doubt that many libraries offer ready access to fifteen years of *Current Contents*®. Anyone wanting to refer to the earlier essays, which I often cite, would find doing so difficult or impossible. So, in 1974, we decided that ISI® would collect and publish them under the title of *Essays of an Information Scientist*.

It seemed that doing so would be easy. After all, the essays, which started appearing intermittently in 1962 and became a regular weekly feature of *Current Contents* a decade later, had already been written and published. Collecting and reprinting them did not seem complicated. Once

the project got started, it became clear how mistaken I was.

First, there were seemingly endless discussions about how best to present the collection. Many alternatives involving overall format, typography, page layout, and paper stock were considered. Finally, we decided to reprint the essays just as they first appeared in *Current Contents*. Though the book will win no prizes for graphic design, the irregularities of type faces and formats reflect some of the history of the development of *Current Contents*.

Then there were questions about indexing. Although I had considered arranging the essays in subject categories, it was decided instead to reprint them in chronological order but also to include a subject-author index as well as a citation index. Additionally, the table of contents lists the full title of every essay along with its original publication date. In this way, readers can rapidly locate specific essays on topics of interest, facilitating chronological look-up as well as browsing. Incidentally, it takes 23 pages to list the 352 essays published between 1962 and 1976.

One of the serious miscalculations of the ease of publishing this book involved our ability to locate reproducible copies of the published essays. Many hours were spent searching through dusty storage shelves. A few of the columns even had to be re-composed. Nevertheless, we were able to include every line of text as well as all of the tables, figures and reprints of other articles that appeared in the original essays.

It was difficult to decide how many years of essays to include. Originally, we planned to reprint them from their inception (1962) through 1975 in one volume. As we neared completion on that plan, however, so much time had passed that it became more sensible to publish two volumes and include all the essays through 1976. In retrospect, I think it was a wise decision, but the agony of waiting to see the book finished became almost intolerable.

During the preparation of *Essays* I have also been involved in the preparation of another book—*Citation Indexing: Its Theory and Application to Science, Technology, and Humanities*, which will be published by Wiley-Interscience. These simultaneous experiences have given me what is perhaps a unique insight into the differences between self-publication and working through a commercial publisher. Neither approach is easy. While working with a commercial publisher eliminates personal involvement in the many production details, these are replaced by concerns over contracts, compatibility of writing style with that of the as-

signed editor, and whether you have too much or too little material for what the publisher considers to be the "right" price for your book. However, every author tends to underestimate the important role of a good publisher in promotion and distribution.

One advantage of self-publication is that we were able to keep the book's price relatively low. I am confident that *Essays*, at \$25.00 for the two-volume set, is priced well below average for a technical book that contains over 1,300 pages.

Milton Van Dyke of Stanford University's School of Engineering describes an experience similar to mine in a recent letter. When the publisher let his book go out of print, he obtained the copyright and published the book himself--without having to raise the 1964 price! Van Dyke writes, "Not everyone will publish his own book, but everyone should *consider* it--and especially republishing one out of print, as I did.... Being an enthusiast, I try to encourage my colleagues, but none has tried yet."

Perhaps his colleagues understood the frustrations involved more than I did. They also may have understood the meaning of "overhead."

One outgrowth of the decision to publish the book ourselves was to establish a division within ISI to deal with book publication. The ISI Press will at least publish an annual collection of my weekly columns, as well as other ISI material.

Joshua Lederberg has written the foreword to the present collection. Dr. Lederberg, Chairman of The Department of Genetics at the Stanford

University School of Medicine, is one of the most "visible" of American scientists. His views are sought by scientific colleagues--as well as by news reporters--on subjects ranging from plasmid engineering to artificial intelligence. In his foreword Dr. Lederberg discusses the "residue of controversy" about publishing citation statistics concerning individual articles, journals, and scientists. While I won't digress into that controversy here, the statement reminded me that *Essays* includes just about every "highly cited" list ever produced at ISI. This should make the book a useful reference tool for those who are interested in the sociometrics of science.

I would be remiss to close any discussion of *Essays* without mentioning ISI's Chief Editor, Robert L. Hayne. It should be fairly obvious to most readers that many of the essays represent an effort which takes more than a few hours of research and writing. Some of my citation studies require assistance from several ISI departments. They also involve considerable bibliographic research and data analysis. Bob Hayne is notable among those who synthesize these data.

I have known Bob since 1951, when I joined the Medical Indexing Project at Johns Hopkins University. He was

then the assistant editor of the *Current List of Medical Literature*, now known as the *Index Medicus*. Together we worked on the rationalization of the subject heading authority list known today as Medical Subject Headings (MeSH). Bob was well qualified. He is a Latin-Greek Scholar. What better background for an etymologist-indexer-classifier? In addition, he knows more about linguistics than I ever will, though we both received graduate training in that arcane field. I don't know where he acquired his encyclopedic knowledge of music, art, and literature. If his alma mater, Washington and Lee, is responsible, send your children there.

Bob is also the fastest typist, stenographer and indexer I ever met. When I met him he could index medical articles in at least ten languages, and recently he learned Arabic just for kicks.

After 25 years of association, Bob and I manage to disagree at least 75% of the time, but somehow eventually it all comes out okay. I push him to his limit and he does the same to me. I wish to thank him for his assistance in arranging many of the original essays and for supervising the production of *Essays of an Information Scientist*.