

Editorial

ELECTRONIC AND HARD-COPY PUBLISHING – AN EMERGING DILEMMA

Publishers are increasingly concerned about the balance between electronic publishing and hard-copy publishing. Recent conferences which the editor attended or which he was involved in brought out these issues. The American Society for Engineering Education (ASEE) publishes its proceedings on CD-ROM with no hard copy version. Admittedly, the hard copy versions used to present a problem of sheer size. Another example is the Multimedia in Engineering Education conference recently held in Hong Kong – here again only summary proceedings were published in hard copy, whereas a CD-ROM contained the papers and laboratory examples. The Engineering Technology journal published by the ASEE has ceased to publish hard copies but publishes on the web. The website of this journal contains complete recent issues and it can be envisaged that the web site will develop on-line experimental demonstrations not possible with a hard copy.

Libraries have a difficult task coping with decreasing budgets and cramped space. On the other hand it is still not quite accepted that a paper that is not available in hard copy can count toward a genuine publication for faculty assessment purposes. The number of outlets for engineering education publications is small, with all journals except the *IJEE* publishing less than 6 issues a year. The only way we can ensure the continuing value of hard copy publication is by enhancing the quality of materials when pitted against the free-for-all web site possibilities. The current standards of publication encourage such a strategy. It is expensive to edit, print, correct and dispatch. A strict selection of hard copy published papers follows from this, which means that the standards to be maintained are high. We need to make sure that we can separate the scholarly from the mediocre in retaining the hard copy.

With this approach, we are suggesting the change to electronic media publication will be incomplete. It may well be so for some time to come.

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