Electronic publications... the ORCIDs and the Orchids

SADJ April 2019, Vol. 74 No. 3 p 107

WG Evans

The electronic publishing world opens many doors and opportunities - the prospect of more immediate publishing, the possibility of reaching a much wider readership, the reduction in printing and postage costs, the release of constraints imposed by having to accommodate to a strict printing protocol. With an eye to history, and in homage to the famous printing press invented by Johannes Gutenberg in the 15th century, the first foray into electronic printing, named Project Gutenberg, was by Michael S Hart in 1971. He intended to render the printed word more accessible through the Internet. An admittedly slow start saw only ten texts available on computers by 1989… but the indefatigable Hart developed Project Gutenberg and is now Director of the company which in January this year recorded some 58000 books available to computer readers. This pales into insignificance however when it is reported that Google Books now have 25 million books on line from a hundred countries and in 400 languages… achieved in these few years from inception in 2004. It is estimated that there are some 130 million titles worldwide, all of which Google intends to capture online!

An impressive, indeed awesome record. Academia was amongst the first to respect the advantages of being online and the 2009 Report of the International Association of Scientific, Technical and Medical Publishers recorded that 96% of the journals in that stable were indeed available on line. Smaller numbers are produced on Open Access, around 8000 being in that freely available format. If it is realised that the world produces over 25,400 scholarly Journals, the attraction of electronic publishing becomes pragmatic.

There is always a downside, of course. The loss of a hand held publication, one in which the pages offer themselves as windows to be opened to find the treasures within, the actual feel of the paper, the readiness with which the Journal could be stored in a pocket ready to be opened during a train journey or at any other snatched opportunity of time... those losses are deeply felt. A serious loss is the decline in advertisements… rightly or wrongly, the commercial world consider it less likely that readers of an electronic production will spend any time looking at the adverts. Here our Journal at once acknowledges warmly the continued support of many Dental Supply houses and other commercial enterprises. Their contribution to the scientific endeavour is crucial and deeply valued. But importantly, the very attribute that electronics offer, the capacity to store, to process, to recall data… has also resulted in additional requirements to enable maximal handling of publication data. Every paper has a unique identifier, all papers are subject to categorisation in large data banks, submission to the various platforms involve special formats, with the list of requirements growing over time. One of the more recent dictates is the scheme to have a common register for every author. The advantages are obvious... a unique number will enable researchers to instantly locate publications, to evaluate the publication record, to ensure that plagiarism is avoided. The scheme has an intriguing name: Open Researcher and Contributor ID. The system is described as a non-proprietary alphanumeric code to uniquely identify scientific and other academic authors and contributors. The name attenuates to the acronym ORCID ...and my 16 digit ORCID is 0000 0002 8132-4829. At the time of writing there were 5,987,657 ORCID already issued. This issue of the South African Dental Journal carries at least one ORCID to identify for all time the author.

All authors are to be required to register and all papers must in future carry the ORCID of at least the principal author. Registration is straightforward and quick, with a warm welcome. We are then engulfed in the electronic world…. although there may be a strange link with biology, for the pronunciation of the acronym ORCID is precisely that of the botanical word ORCHID. These flowers of mystique, of perfection, of unique beauty, belong to the family Orchidaceae, of which there are 880 genera and some 26000 species worldwide. Each flower has the intrigue of perfection. But wait… whence the name Orchidaceae, given originally by Carl Linnaeus who in 1753 recognised eight varieties? In 1845 John Lindley shortened the term to Orchid, apparently recorded in a book on School Biology. So the etymology? From Greek *Orkis*, from Latin *Orchis*, both meaning “testicle”. How so? Examine the roots of an orchid and the resemblance is evident. There are many comments which spring to mind, but the most genteel is that in human terms, both are usually kept hidden.

This issue of the Journal breaks new ground with the inclusion of ORCIDs... but retains a firm hold on the essentials... *vide* one of our lead papers which reports on some alarming findings in our routines to control microbial contamination in our laboratories. It is almost paradoxical that with all our meticulous attention to infection control in the surgery, we may lose that basic attention in the laboratory. Moving from the basics to the almost esoteric, consider the exciting opportunities described in a paper discussing applications of cellular biology in endodontics. Whether we are turning the pages by hand or are relying on the computer to do this, there are indeed hidden treasures to be found!

WG Evans: Managing editor, Email: bill.evans@wits.ac.za