UKSG

Transfer: progress and prospects

The Transfer Code of Practice is a Recommended Practice of the National Information Standards Organization (NISO). It seeks to address the issues that can arise when journals change publishers, and its administration is governed by NISO's Transfer Standing Committee. This article will discuss Transfer's progress and prospects, with topics including the initiative's history, elements of the Recommended Practice, the initiative's move from UKSG to NISO, recent developments, and benefits to libraries, publishers and scholarly societies. Finally, we will discuss what is next for Transfer.

Introduction

The Transfer Code of Practice ('Code') is a voluntary code of conduct and best practices for journal publishers, which contains guidelines for key steps to take when journal owners transfer their journal content to and from one another.[1]

The Code is a Recommended Practice of the National Information Standards Organization (NISO) and its administration is now governed by NISO's Transfer Standing Committee. This article will address Transfer's progress and prospects, with topics including the initiative's history, elements of the Code, the initiative's move from UKSG to NISO, recent developments, and benefits to libraries, publishers and scholarly societies. We will also look at what is next for Transfer and some ways that publishers, libraries, and societies can participate in the work the Standing Committee is doing.

As all stakeholders in the scholarly publishing ecosystem are aware, sometimes online access to journal content can be disrupted or lost when journal owners move their publishing arrangements from one publisher to another. Transfer helps publishers to ensure that journal content remains easily accessible by librarians and readers when there is a transfer between parties and ensures that the transfer process occurs with minimum disruption. Publishers who register as Transfer compliant are asked to endorse the Code and to abide by its principles in transfer situations wherever it is commercially reasonable to do so. This minimizes the unpleasant surprises that have traditionally occurred for readers, librarians and others when online journal content does not appear where it is expected to.

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'guidelines for key steps to take when journal owners transfer their journal content'

Progress: Transfer's history

Prior to online journal publishing as a widespread practice, journal transfers did not typically result in long-term loss of access to purchased content. This was because once a subscribing library had received print journal issues, these issues remained the physical property of the library in perpetuity, regardless of what happened to the journal's publishing arrangements later. As more and more journal owners moved their content online, digitized back-file content and began to generate future issues of their publications in electronic format (i.e. 'born-digital' content), problems unique to this new mode of publishing quickly became apparent to the scholarly journal community. Specifically, problems over access and communication arose when journals changed publisher.

Work began on an initiative to address these issues in early 2006, with the formation of a small working group of representatives from libraries, publishers, intermediaries such as periodicals subscription agents, and other parties relevant to the scholarly journal supply chain. A group led by Nancy Buckley of Blackwell Publishing was formed and driven by stakeholders in the publishing and library communities. They began soliciting ideas from these stakeholder communities, engaging in informal discussions at meetings, and then held an open workshop on the topic at the 2006 UKSG Annual Conference.[2, 3]

The Transfer Working Group officially coalesced later that year under the auspices of UKSG, and its objective was to develop procedures and policies to guide the transfer of journals between publishers so that the movement of journals would cause minimum disruption for all parties involved and adhere to an agreed-upon code of practice. The Group began meeting regularly at the Blackwell offices in Oxford to identify the issues and stakeholders, to prioritize problems to address and to determine how to create a work product that would be both palatable for publishers to commit to and also beneficial for the full range of parties in the scholarly publishing ecosystem.[4] This was – and remains – no small task. The Group had to tread carefully the fine line between avoiding mandates that would be viewed as encouraging anti-competitive business practices and creating a product that would have enough weight and authority to incentivize publishers to sign up to it and to comply with it once they committed to endorsing the code of practice.

Key issues identified early on included the timing of journal transfers, communication to interested parties at appropriate times, pricing and inclusion of titles in large publisher packages, and current and perpetual access to content for subscribers and their users. Early work of the Group included surveying publisher websites to determine the number and type of publishing changes, including self-published-to-publisher, publisher-to-self-published, publisher-to-publisher and acquisition-by-publisher, as well as related issues such as title changes, title mergers/splits and cessations. The Group also used what was learned from scanning the existing journal publishing landscape to determine and prioritize other key issues to address.[5]

The first version of the Transfer Code of Practice was released in 2007 and was followed in September 2008 by a more robust Version 2.0, after a thorough process of gathering stakeholder feedback and thoughtful revision. Following the launch of Version 2.0, the Transfer Working Group shifted its focus to encouraging publisher endorsements and developing a way to notify the scholarly publishing community of journal transfers.[6] Work on Transfer continued under the governance of UKSG, with Ed Pentz (Executive Director of Crossref) chairing the Group from 2008–2010. In 2010 the Group decided to implement a publisher and librarian co-chair model, naming Alison Mitchell (Springer Nature) and Elizabeth Winter (Georgia Institute of Technology) as its first co-chairs.

> 'the Transfer Working Group shifted its focus to encouraging publisher endorsements and developing a way to notify the … community of journal transfers'

Move to NISO

In 2013 Transfer Working Group members and leadership of NISO began discussing whether it might make sense for Transfer to move into the NISO portfolio of standards and best practices to become a NISO Recommended Practice. These are '"best practices" or "guidelines" for methods, materials, or practices in order to give guidance to the user. These documents usually represent a leading edge, exceptional model, or a proven industry practice. Use of any or all elements of a Recommended Practice is discretionary; it may be used as stated or modified by the user to meet specific needs.'[7] This designation seemed to be a good fit with the nature of the Transfer Code – voluntary, yet with clear value in compliance – for all stakeholders in the journal supply chain.

After discussion, both UKSG and the Transfer Working Group approved the move later in 2013, and Transfer leadership began drafting a work item proposal for NISO approval. This proposal was accepted by the NISO Board in 2014, and in February 2015 NISO and

UKSG issued a press release to announce the move officially.[8] Of the move, NISO Executive Director Todd Carpenter stated,

'NISO is very pleased to take on responsibility for the *Transfer Code of Practice* … We are very well placed to disseminate information about the Code, encourage publisher endorsement and implementation, and promote the best practices in the Code. Additionally, the Code fits nicely in our portfolio alongside related recommended practices such as *PIE-J: The Presentation & Identification of E-Journals* (NISO RP-16-2013), *Online Supplemental Journal Article Materials* (NISO RP-15-2013), *Journal Article Versions* (NISO RP-8-2008), and the forthcoming *Protocol for Exchanging Serial Content (PESC)*.'

With the move, the Transfer Code of Practice became a NISO Recommended Practice under the governance of NISO's Business Information Topic Committee, which has responsibility for oversight of standards and practices related to the acquisition, licensing, purchasing and analysis of information.[9] In addition to Transfer, this includes SUSHI, SERU, PIE-J and Altmetrics.[10]

> 'the Transfer Code of Practice became a NISO Recommended Practice'

The Transfer Standing Committee is comprised of individuals from the publishing, library, society and intermediary fields, with the current composition of the Group under NISO including representatives of nine publishers, five libraries and seven intermediaries. The Group is currently led by two co-chairs, one a publisher (James Phillpotts of Oxford University Press) and one a librarian (Elizabeth Winter of the Georgia Institute of Technology) and meets every two months. To date, the Transfer Code of Practice has more than 60 endorsing publishers, including major market participants such as Cambridge University Press, Oxford University Press, Springer Nature, Elsevier, Wiley and Taylor & Francis, among many others. The full list of Transfer-compliant publishers and relevant contacts for each can be found on the Transfer website.[11]

In 2015 Version 3.0 of the Code was released.[12]

Highlights include:

- access to the title: ensures continued access for customers where the Transferring Publisher has granted perpetual access rights

- digital content files – current (born digital) and archive (digitized from print), if available: covers transfer of digital files

- subscription lists: covers early transfer of the subscription lists and an outline of subscriber data types

- journal URL: covers transfer of journal-related domain name(s) and provision of a link and/or redirect to the new journal home page

- communication: covers communication to customers (including electronic table of contents alert recipients) and relevant intermediaries

- DOI name ownership: covers changes to digital object identifier (DOI) name ownership.

Key changes to Version 3.0 (the current version at press time) included the introduction of new subsections dealing with content published 'ahead of paginated issue' as well as new content and data types to keep up with market practices, including online editorial systems, content in production and publisher-supplied usage data. Also new were best practices for dealing with the details of institutions receiving the journal via deeply discounted or 'big deal' collections and readers who have gratis access to journal content.

Changes related to journal URLs included guidelines for transitional URL links or redirects as well as preferred practice regarding HTTP301 permanent redirects. Updates were also made to advise on communication to journals' e-alert registrants, likely audiences for communications from receiving publishers (publishers to whom journals are transferring) and a new subsection highlighting the existence of the Transfer Alerting Service (TAS) – an

important benefit provided by Transfer, which will be discussed further.

Benefits to libraries, publishers and scholarly societies

What does Transfer do and provide for its stakeholders, including libraries, publishers and scholarly societies? The three primary areas of focus for the Standing Committee reflect the three main benefits of Transfer for stakeholders. These are the development of the Transfer Code of Practice, an ongoing program of education, support and presentation, and the development and maintenance of the TAS.

At the core of Transfer is the Code of Practice itself,[13] which contains the best practice guidelines for both transferring and receiving publishers. This set of best practices adhered to by a large portion of the journal publishing market offers benefits to publishers, librarians, societies and other stakeholders. It does this by creating reliable practices for organization, communication, data transfer, access to content, etc., thereby minimizing misunderstandings between involved parties, loss of access to content for subscribers and the other sorts of unpleasant surprises that historically resulted from a lack of uniformity in practice during transfer situations. For librarians, the topics covered in the Code document provide valuable insight into the complexities of the journal publishing business and the variety of issues publishers and societies have to consider. The latest version of the Code also includes a glossary of terms and a set of supplementary guidelines for publishers on how to implement the guidelines when they find themselves in a transfer situation.[14]

Another benefit to publishers, librarians and societies alike is Transfer's ongoing program of education, support and presentation to help the various constituencies in the journal content supply chain better understand each other's challenges, complexities and priorities. Members of the Transfer Standing Committee regularly give presentations at relevant conferences and professional meetings and write articles to promote the use and understanding of the Code and accompanying services. A selection of Transfer-related presentations and publications authored by Standing Committee members is housed on the NISO Transfer site.[15]

Transfer's third major benefit is one of the most important accomplishments of the Transfer Standing Committee and also its most popular – the TAS. The TAS is Transfer's mechanism for communicating the details of transitioning journals to stakeholders.[16] It is a public database that contains information on journal transfers, submitted by publishers for titles they are responsible for, and houses information about transfers that have taken place since 2009. Publishers submit metadata about journal transfers to the TAS database, either on an individual title basis or via bulk upload. This metadata is available to interested parties via three methods:

- through the database itself: users can search the database's web interface, view results and export results in .csv format[17]

- via an RSS feed to a feed reader[18]

- via email alerts sent to a listserv and pushed to listserv subscribers.[19]

Transfer Standing Committee members, UKSG and NISO worked together with the UK's higher education digital services group, Jisc, the Jisc Usage Statistics Portal (JUSP) project and Cranfield University to develop the database, which has been a great benefit to users. At the time of going to press, the e-mail list had over 600 registrants.

Prospects: What is next for Transfer?

So far we have looked at Transfer's history, body of work, its recent transition to NISO, and its benefits for stakeholders. We will conclude by looking at Transfer's prospects: priority goals for the coming year, additional areas of focus and opportunities for community participation.

'The first priority goal is future development of the Transfer Alerting Service'

The first priority goal is future development of the TAS. Ideas for enhancements to the service were solicited from TAS users and include an application programming interface (API), which has been developed and is currently being tested. The Standing Committee is also investigating sources of future funding for development of the TAS, as previous work was supported in part by UKSG and in part by volunteer efforts.

The second priority goal is outreach, education and training. The Standing Committee has three subgroups focused on this goal as it relates to the three key stakeholder groups of publishers, librarians and societies. These subgroups are working on developing targeted informational materials and opportunities for outreach to each stakeholder group. In addition, the Standing Committee is currently working on changes to the Transfer website[20] to simplify the content and layout and to make the site more user-friendly.

> 'The second priority goal is outreach, education and training'

The third priority goal for Transfer is the evolution of the Code itself. Revisions are needed every few years due to changes in the journal publishing market such as new technologies, business models and publication practices. As soon as a version of the Code is released, there are already suggestions from stakeholders to be considered in future revisions. The Group is currently looking at issues related to deferred revenue when journals transfer and matters that arise whenever titles go open access. Other current areas of focus include developing a new logo for the initiative, marketing Transfer and encouraging endorsement by additional publishers.

> 'The third priority goal for Transfer is the evolution of the Code itself'

Finally, we offer some participation opportunities for members of various stakeholder groups.

Librarians:

- explore the TAS through any of the methods noted above

- contact Transfer Standing Committee members if there are particular publishers you would like to see become Transfer compliant

- consider including language in your license agreements for full-text journals, requiring publishers to agree to adhere to the Code guidelines in transfer situations.

Publishers:

- if your organization is already Transfer compliant, please familiarize yourself with the Transfer guidelines and co-ordinate with colleagues in transfer situations to be sure that your organization is handling its transfers properly

- if your organization is not already Transfer compliant but interested in becoming Transfer-compliant, please contact one of the co-chairs of the Transfer Standing Committee to learn more and understand potential next steps towards compliance.

Societies:

- if your organization is considering moving its content to a different publishing arrangement, please familiarize yourself with the Code guidelines and consider selecting a publisher who is Transfer-compliant.

In conclusion, Transfer, celebrating ten years of work, has made significant progress and has contributed valuably to the international scholarly publishing community. Now an established NISO Recommended Practice, the Transfer Code of Practice continues to broaden its impact and achieve its goals of addressing the issues that can arise when journals change publishers and easing that transition for all parties involved. Please contact

one of the co-chairs of the Transfer Standing Committee to become involved with Transfer activities.

Abbreviations and Acronyms
A list of the abbreviations and acronyms used in this and other *Insights* articles can be accessed here – click on the URL below and then select the 'Abbreviations and Acronyms' link at the top of the page it directs you to: **http://www.uksg.org/publications#aa**

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Competing Interests
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