



## People in the News

### Ben Hudson

Cartoon Abstracts from Taylor & Francis (T&F) are a fun new way of visualizing academic research and are one of the winners of the 2016 ALPSP Awards for Innovation in Publishing. Each cartoon summarizes the original authors' work through powerful illustration. This aids the understanding of difficult concepts, broadens the appeal of niche topics and helps transcend language barriers. The ALPSP Awards judges believe that the cartoons have the potential to transform the way in which young people and the wider public engage with research publishing. Cartoon Abstracts are the idea of Ben Hudson and we caught up with him for a question-and-answer session.

**Q:** *Ben, congratulations on being a winner of the 2016 ALPSP Awards for Innovation. Can you please start off by telling us a bit about yourself, your background and your role at T&F?*

**A:** Thank you! I still have a huge smile on my face.

I'm a marketer at T&F, so it's my job to ensure that our articles get the readership they deserve. I've always had a passion for science communication – before joining T&F I qualified as a secondary school teacher.

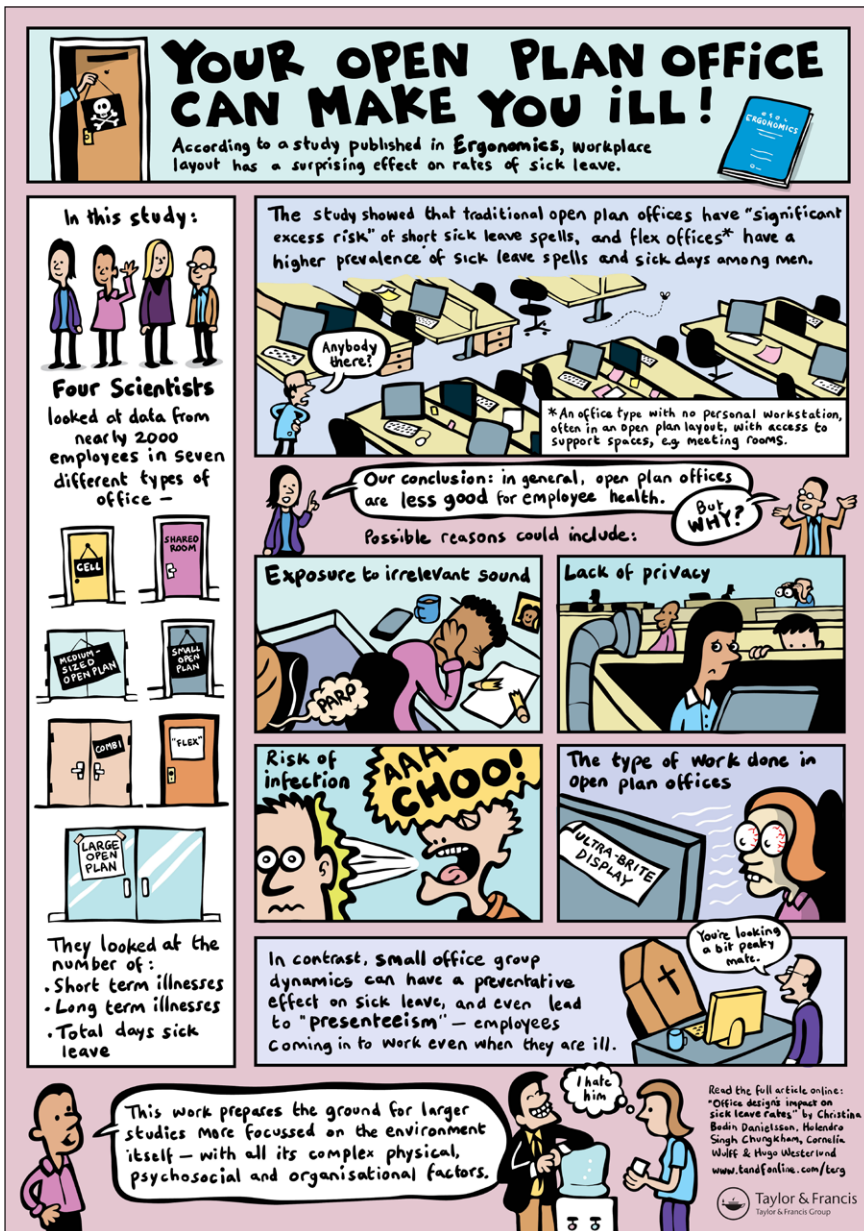
I'm on Twitter [@iambenudson](https://twitter.com/iambenudson) if you want to find out the latest Cartoon Abstracts developments.

**Q:** *Can you tell us about how you got the idea for Cartoon Abstracts and how it was first received at T&F? Were there any challenges in convincing a traditional scholarly publisher to run with the idea?*

**A:** Marketers are already using many different tactics to promote individual research articles, and attracting the attention of an audience is an ever-evolving challenge.

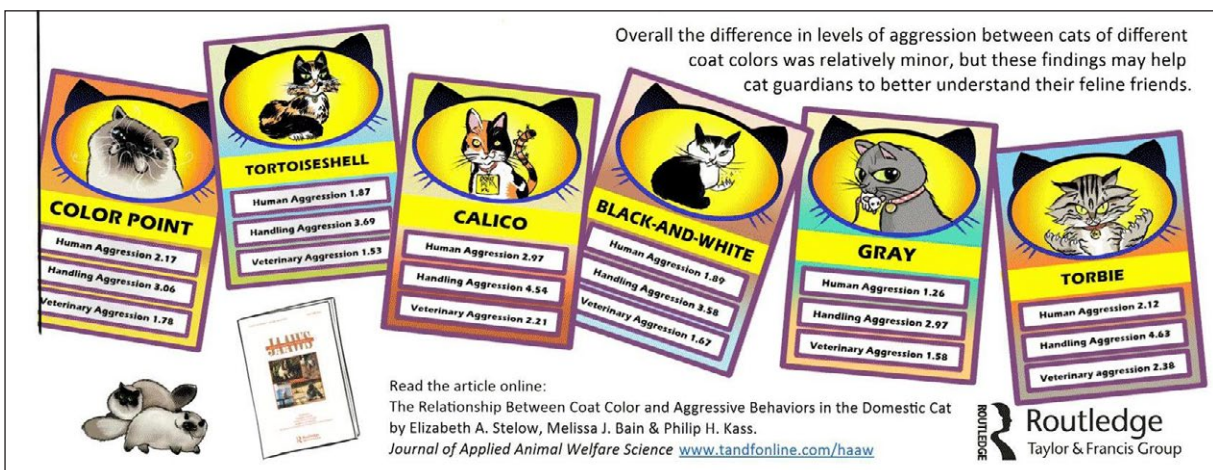
I wanted to create something that stands out from the crowd, so I worked with illustrators to combine the storytelling of a good press release with the highly visual nature of infographics. The end result is concise and engaging – perfect for today's marketing environment.

Each individual Cartoon Abstract summarizes the original authors' work through illustration, harnessing the overwhelming power of images over text. Illustrations can aid the understanding of difficult concepts, broaden the appeal of niche topics and transcend language barriers.



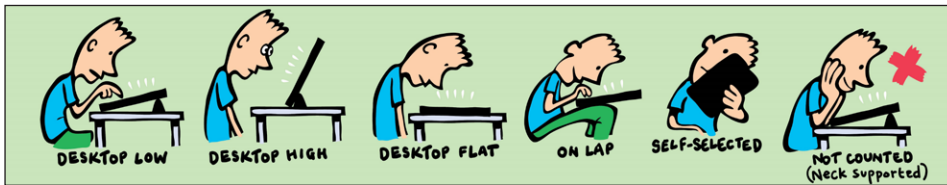
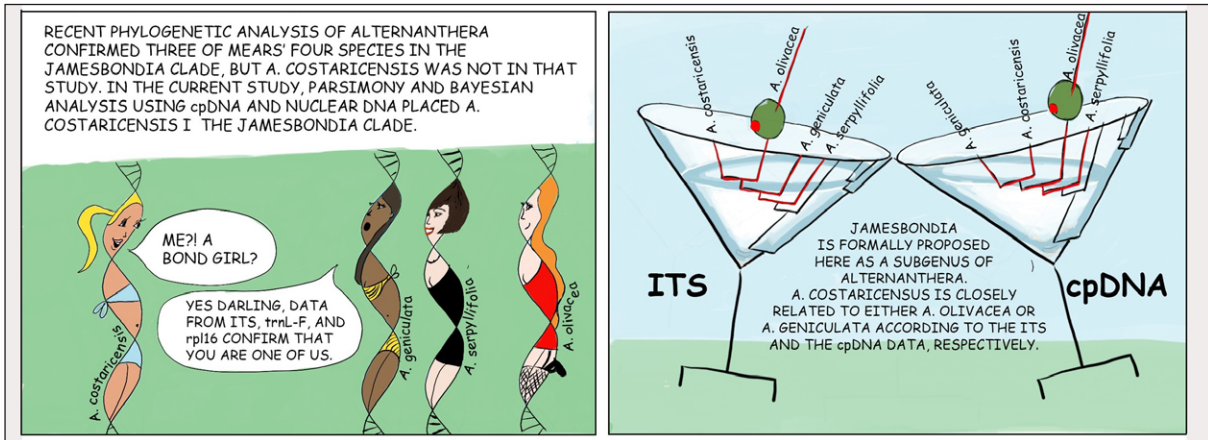
The cartoons are incredibly multifunctional. They can be used digitally on social media, blogs and websites, and paper comics have been printed for distribution at conferences. A1-size posters can be used by authors around their department or even in poster sessions.

I never faced any major obstacles in implementation. The project simply scaled up over time as enthusiasm for it grew. See all of the cartoons at [www.cartoonabstracts.com](http://www.cartoonabstracts.com).



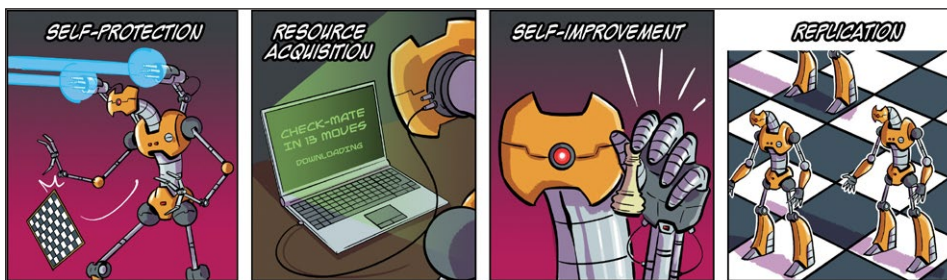


**Q:** We are amazed by the talent of the cartoonist who, for example, manages to make engaging cartoons for subjects as diverse as 'A New High Entropy Alloy' to 'Meet the Mosasaur with Binocular Vision'. I imagine it might sometimes be challenging for the cartoonist to take a technical subject and make it into an interesting and engaging cartoon. How do you work with the cartoonist and author to create the Cartoon Abstracts?

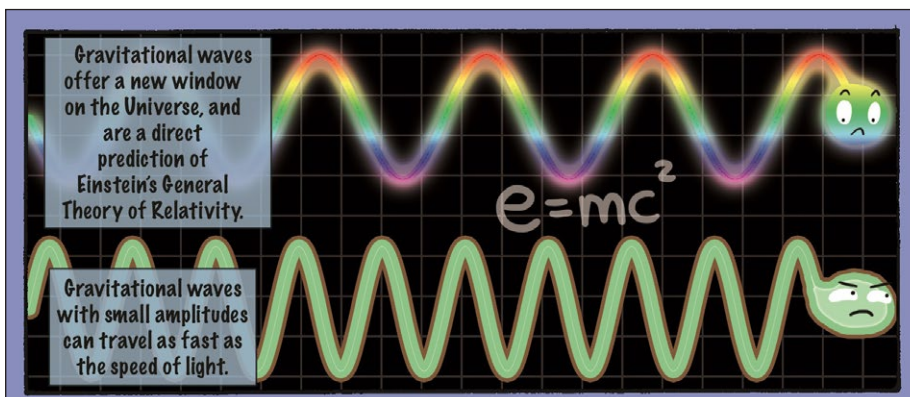


**A:** A lot of work occurs behind the scenes in the production process to ensure that everyone will be happy with the end result.

Firstly, I write a clear brief for the illustrators to work from. This breaks the article down into the salient points that I want to see in the cartoon. I often suggest visuals that the illustrator

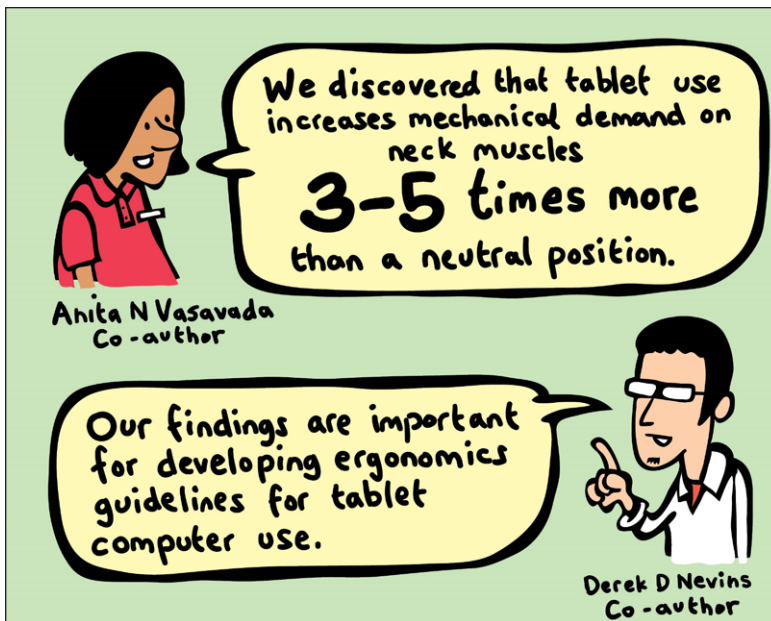


should use, especially where a topic is more challenging for a lay person to understand. Portraying research findings through visual representation can go a long way towards

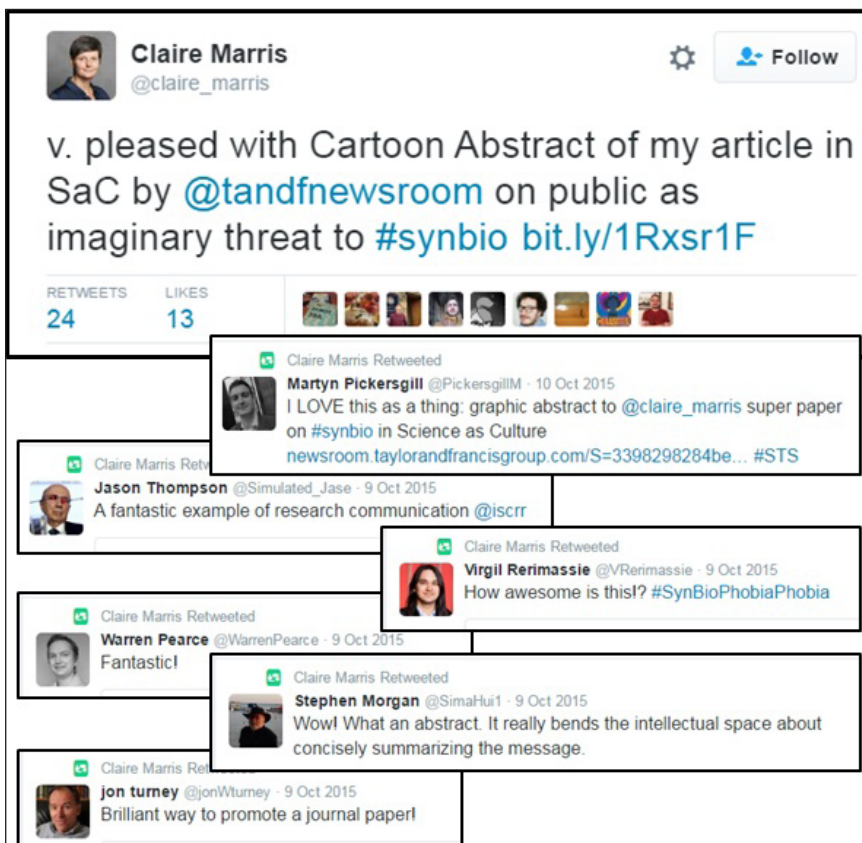




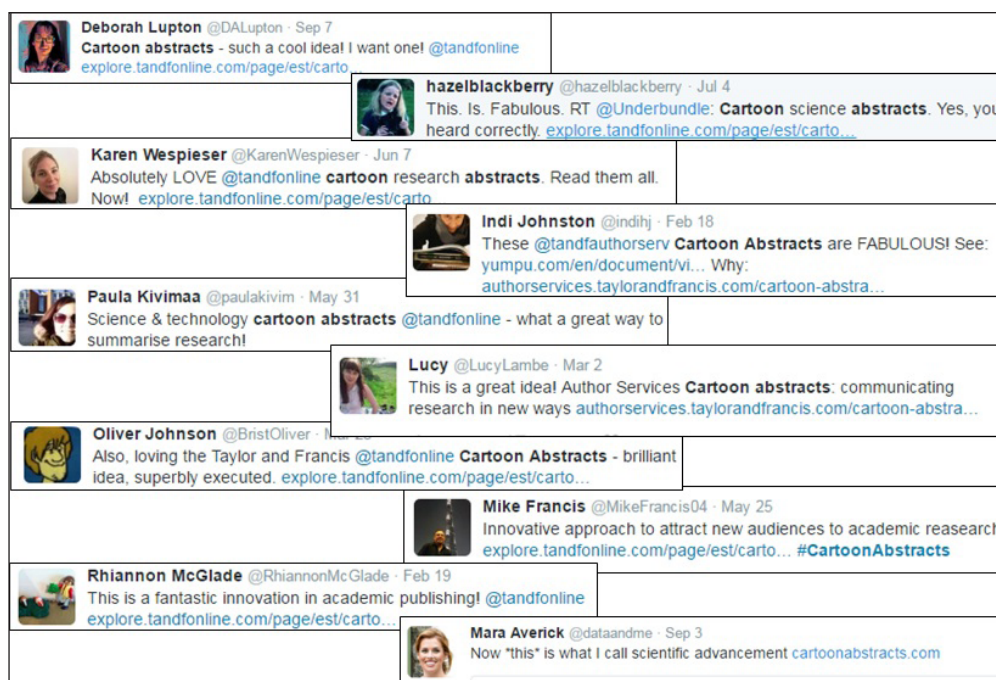




- 'Could a Chess Robot Cause Judgement Day?' is a fascinating topic with universal appeal.



- 'Detecting the Gravitational Waves Einstein Predicted' simplifies difficult-to-understand physics into a format suitable for lay people.
- 'The New Noah's Ark: Only the Beautiful Need Apply' is itself a beautiful piece of artwork.



- 'Coat Color and Aggressive Behaviors in Domestic Cats' is so engaging, from the Top Trumps to the parody of Jurassic Park. My cat also makes a cameo as the Color Point.

In fact, my cats make a few appearances. Look out for them hidden as Easter eggs from time to time!

**Q:** What sort of reaction do you get from authors when they see their work described in a cartoon? Do they appreciate seeing themselves depicted as cartoon characters?

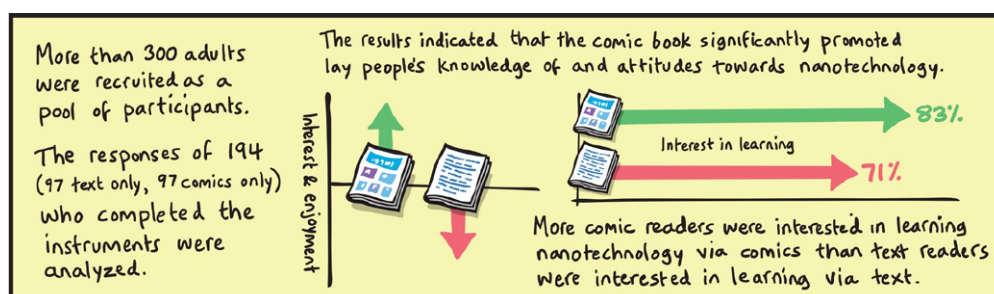
**A:** Authors love seeing themselves as cartoon characters.

This encourages them to share their cartoon through their own networks, thus increasing our communications reach. The author characters also resonate with the audience.

**Q:** What sort of reactions have you had from readers?

**A:** Author-led promotion leads to a wealth of positive interactions on social media.

In addition, Cartoon Abstracts truly has gone viral, winning organic praise from the academic community and beyond. Positive comments continue to roll in on a daily basis. Find out for yourself by searching 'Cartoon Abstracts' on Twitter – and see the small selection of tweets shown here.



The paper comics are a hugely popular give-away at conferences. On one occasion, I was even approached by a conference hall employee who told me he had taken a copy home for his young family, and they had ended up reading the full papers behind the cartoons as a result. As a form of science communication, Cartoon Abstracts capture the attention of not only the academics of today, but also younger generations and the wider public.

In today's online world, there is an increasing demand from the general public to be

82 informed about scientific advancement. On YouTube, for example, the brilliant science communication channel Kurzgesagt has three million subscribers and over 150 million views.

Cartoon Abstracts hold several advantages over video. A cartoon does not commit the reader to five minutes of their time, as their eye can pick out the key information quickly. Cartoons are data friendly to the increasing number of individuals using mobile devices to access science communication. Similarly, headphones or speakers are not required to digest the information.

Most importantly, however, different people learn in different ways, and Cartoon Abstracts simply fill a different gap in the same market. As stated in the cartoon 'Are Comics a Good Medium for Science Communication?', 'Science comics have the potential to develop lay people's ongoing interest and enjoyment for learning science'.

**Q:** *Is there a message for marketers in traditional publishing that there is scope for more innovative campaigns?*

**A:** Certainly. I would encourage all marketers in academic publishing to think differently about their audience. Who are they trying to reach, and what is the best way to make their product stand out from the crowd? Today's world is fast changing, and as marketers we must adapt and innovate to stay ahead of the competition.

There is also a message for authors to act as marketers of their own work. There is so much potential for their articles beyond publication. Be proud of what you have written, get your research noticed, and don't be afraid to try something different in doing so. With the right approach, you too can go viral.



Ben receiving his ALPSP Award for Innovation

**Q:** *There was great excitement in the room when the winners of the ALPSP awards for innovation were announced. Your wife was at home, how was she following the events?*

**A:** Being eight months pregnant at the time, Sarah decided to stay at home for the awards. We had been in touch through text all day, and naturally I wasn't replying when I had to go on stage to collect the award. But Sarah's a good Poirot-style detective; she used Twitter for the first time to find out the result, and sent me a huge stream of emotional texts containing lots of capital letters. Needless to say, I think she was extremely proud.

**Q:** *Were you surprised to hear your name called out?*

**A:** Yes! It's still a bit surreal. When I set out with my little marketing idea, I had no clue it would blossom into such a fantastic medium for science communication. I'm delighted that it has resonated so well, and on such a wide scale.

I was up against some tough competition, so my thanks go to the judges for believing in Cartoon Abstracts. The other finalists are each great products themselves, and it's an exciting time to be at the forefront of innovation in academic publishing.

Finally, I would also like to thank the illustrators who have helped to make Cartoon Abstracts what it is. Without them, none of this would have been possible.

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To cite this article:

Estelle, L, People in the News: Ben Hudson, *Insights*, 2017, 30(1), 76-83; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1629/uksg.332>

Published by UKSG and Ubiquity Press on 10 March 2017