

**Richard Poynder**

**Monday, September 17, 2012**

**The OA Interviews: Ahmed Hindawi, founder of Hindawi Publishing Corporation**

***<http://poynder.blogspot.fr/2012/09/the-oa-interviews-ahmed-hindawi-founder.html>***

*Founded in 1997, [Hindawi Publishing Corporation](#) was the first subscription publisher to convert its entire portfolio of journals to Open Access (OA). This has enabled the company to grow very rapidly and today it publishes over 400 OA journals.*

*The speed of Hindawi's growth, which included creating many new journals in a short space of time and mass mailing researchers, led to suspicion that it was a "predatory" organisation. Today, however, most of its detractors have been won round and — bar the occasional hiccup — Hindawi is viewed as a respectable and responsible publisher.*

*Nevertheless, Hindawi's story poses a number of questions. First, how do researchers distinguish between good and bad publishers in today's Internet-fuelled publishing revolution, and what constitutes acceptable practice anyway? Second, does today's Western-centric publishing culture tend to discriminate against publishers based in the developing world? Third, might the author-side payment model fast becoming the norm in OA publishing turn out to be flawed? Finally, can we expect OA publishing to prove less expensive than subscription publishing? If not, what are the implications?*

*These at least were some of the questions that occurred to me during my interview with Ahmed Hindawi.*

## **Ambition**

After training in (and briefly teaching) High Energy Physics, Ahmed Hindawi decided he wanted to become a scholarly publisher — an ambition sparked by the advent of the Internet, his experience using the physics pre-print server [arXiv](#), and a newly-acquired passion for typography.

Inspired by this dream, Hindawi and his wife Nagwa Abdel-Mottaleb returned from the US to their native country of Egypt and founded Hindawi Publishing Corporation. From the start they set their sights high, determined to “make a dent in the universe” by leveraging the potential of the Web to “disrupt the scholarly communications industry”.

Becoming a player in the scholarly publishing market was at that time, however, no walk in the park — not least because the subscription model traditionally used to publish scholarly journals had enabled a few large publishers to acquire near-monopoly powers.

Nevertheless, after several false starts, Hindawi and his wife did gain a foothold, taking over publication of the *International Journal of Mathematics and Mathematical Sciences* ([IJMMS](#)) in 1999.

## **Big break**

Hindawi’s big break came in 2001 — when he made a daring bid to acquire the journal *International Mathematics Research Notices* ([IMRN](#)) from [Duke\\_University\\_Press](#). Lacking the wherewithal to buy the journal outright, Hindawi proposed an instalment plan and, to his

delight, Duke accepted his proposal. “This was the most significant journal acquisition that we had made up to that point, and it doubled our annual revenue,” says Hindawi.

Now established as a traditional scholarly publisher, Hindawi found himself increasingly frustrated with the limitations of the subscription system. Not only does it make it difficult for new entrants to break into the market, but it inevitably erects a paywall between reader and author, and so significantly limits the potential audience. As a result, many subscription journals have only a handful of subscribers. “[W]e were very concerned about the readership of these journals,” says Hindawi. “It just didn’t feel right to call this publishing.”

So the publisher began experimenting with ways to make the research that he published available *sans* paywall, including inviting authors to pay a publication fee so that their papers could be made freely available on the Internet — a model that later came to be known as [hybrid Open Access](#) (OA).

By 2004, however, the pioneering OA publishers BioMed Central ([BMC](#)) and Public Library of Science ([PLoS](#)) had demonstrated that it was possible to build a viable publishing business from so-called [gold, OA](#). So Hindawi made the decision to convert his entire portfolio of journals to gold OA, a process completed by 2007 ...

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If you wish to read the interview with Ahmed Hindawi, please click on the link below.

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Posted by Richard Poynder at 09:34



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### **POST-GREEN, NO-FAULT PEER-REVIEWED PUBLISHING**

My sole goal is global Open Access (OA) -- and to reach that all that's need is global (Green) OA self-archiving mandates by research institutions and funders worldwide.

But for those whose goal is not "just" that, but a transition to (Gold) OA publishing, and at a fair, affordable, scaleable and sustainable price, mandating Green OA globally is still the necessary first step.

Plans by universities and research funders to pay the costs of Open Access Publishing ("Gold OA") pre-emptively today ([Finch](#)-style) are profligate, premature, and counter-productive.

They are equally premature, profligate and counter-productive is mandated as Dr. Hindawi has proposed, to be paid pre-emptively today out of researcher's grants.

Funds are short; 80% of journals (including virtually all the top journals) are still subscription-based, tying up the potential funds to pay for Gold OA; the asking price for Gold OA is still high; and there is concern that

paying to publish may inflate acceptance rates and lower quality standards.

What is needed now is for universities and funders to mandate OA self-archiving (of authors' final peer-reviewed drafts, immediately upon acceptance for publication) ("Green OA").

That will provide immediate OA; and if and when universal Green OA should go on to make subscriptions unsustainable (because users are satisfied with just the Green OA versions) that will in turn induce journals to cut costs (print edition, online edition, access-provision, archiving), downsize to just providing the service of peer review, and convert to the Gold OA cost-recovery model; meanwhile, the subscription cancellations will have released the funds to pay these much-reduced residual service costs.

The natural way to charge for the service of peer review then will be on a "no-fault basis," with the author's institution or funder paying for each round of refereeing, regardless of outcome (acceptance, revision/re-refereeing, or rejection).

This will minimize cost while at the same time protecting against inflated acceptance rates and decline in quality standards.

Harnad, S. (2010) [No-Fault Peer Review Charges: The Price of Selectivity Need Not Be Access Denied or Delayed](#). *D-Lib Magazine* 16 (7/8).

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[mathlight](#) said...

In the interview, Hindawi dismisses the spam problem. He says that most researchers are happy to receive announcements of new journals and that an average researchers gets 3 emails per year. Though it is higher than that, imagine 3 junk emails from every major publisher, from every major vendor of computer equipment, from any major new service on the internet and so on, going through about few dozen areas of interest to a researcher. And these new journals are as a rule not in the specialization of a researcher. In addition one should know that active researchers have email and presence and more than one institution what makes spam higher. They are spammers period, in fact the most obvious spammers in scientific area which I know, in addition to those Orlando, Caracas and Crete conferences we get all the time. By the way I found some of those organizers of Caracas etc. among

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