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Journal of Media Business Studies

Perspectives on joining a commercial academic publisher

Reflecting on Norsk Medietidskrift's switch to digital open access (Nordicom Information 2/2015), I would like to share our experiences from the Journal of Media Business Studies (JOMBS). During the past two years JOMBS has been facing similar questions on how to promote its long-term development. However, our solution to these questions was opposite to NMT's. Consequently, during fall of 2014 we signed a contract with global commercial publisher Taylor and Francis. I don't believe there is one universal solution that fits all, and this article should not be seen as advocating one particular choice or any particular publisher for that sake. These are merely our takeaways from that process – the issues we faced and how we evaluated the different options available to us. We do however invite you to read JOMBS and we value your views and comments on its development.

Journal of Media Business Studies is essentially one of three leading international journals focusing on media management and economics. Established in 2004 at the Media Management and Transformation Centre (MMTC) at Jönköping International Business School it aimed from day one at a global audience. The founding editor, Robert Picard, had already taken the initiative 15 year earlier to establish another journal addressing the economic aspects of media – Journal of Media Economics. Being published out of a business school, the objective of JOMBS was to apply the use of business and management analysis theories to the media industries and its challenges.

Over the years JOMBS has achieved that – it has had contributions from authors from Europe, North and South America, Asia, and Australia, addressing issues such as media ownership, entrepreneurship, strategy, and organizational change, media brands, marketing,

pricing issues, consumer preferences, as well as regulation and market structures, just to mention a few. Together it paints a wide and comprehensive picture of the business of media.

The journal has also grown. It started off as a biannual publication, became triannual in 2007, and quarterly in 2009. Marketing was conducted from the MMTC via conferences and mailings and the journal soon attracted individual and institutional subscribers from all over the world. Its readership, and impact has also continued to expand over the years.

The search for a sustainable financing model

I took over as editor-in-chief in fall 2013, and was soon joined by Patrik Wikström of Queensland University of Technology and Greg Nyilasy of University of Melbourne as associate editors. Together, we identified a number of long term challenges for JOMBS.

Digital access and distribution. At the start in 2004 the journal was only available in print – and each issue had to be packed at the uni-

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versity and posted to its subscribers. Some years later the journal was indexed by EBSCO, which made digital access possible through library databases. Still this access was limited to a few volumes and online access via EBSCO was only available after a time lag of around 12 months. At the same time the preferences of subscribers had shifted from print to digital and in fact many subscribers did not even want the printed version. In essence, JOMBS was in need of a well-functioning website that allowed digital-first publishing.

Better marketing and visibility. Over its first ten years, JOMBS had established itself among the top three international journals in the field of media economics and management. At the same time, we saw a huge potential in reaching out to related fields such as communication, marketing, advertising, innovation, entrepreneurship and technology to expand the readership of the journal and attract new authors and subscribers. However, in order to do this we needed both the organization and the technical competence to be represented at conferences, at community e-mailing lists, and to tag the journal and its contents for better visibility in various search engines.

Better internal processes for handling submissions and reviews. In the past, the process of managing submitted articles had largely been done by hand. Manuscripts were emailed to the journal, manually handled by several persons throughout the review process, a system that was both labor intensive and left room for errors and delays in the process. The unanimous conclusion was that JOMBS needed professional content management system – and these do generally not come cheap.

Improved design and layout. The design of JOMBS was previously functional but not very appealing and it had not been updated since the start in 2004. Additionally, submission guidelines were not entirely strict which caused a lot of work in the copy-editing process. For this reason we needed both redesign, a more professional layout, and also more developed submission policies and guidelines.

A self-sustaining financing model. By 2013, the journal was easily covering all print and

distribution costs through its subscription revenues. However, that did not cover all the time spent on copyediting, administrating invoices, subscribers, authors and manuscript handling. Instead, those work hours were covered by the Media Management and Transformation Centre via its long term support from the Carl-Olof & Jenz Hamrin Foundation. Though the center finances were at good health, we felt that it was due time for the journal to stand on its own and to establish a business model that ensured the continued publication of JOMBS independent of the future priorities of the MMTc.

The options

Option 1. One option that we considered was to apply for separate funding for JOMBS. The Swedish Science Council – VR is one institution which offers financial support to academic journals in the humanities and social sciences. However, VR posed two demands that we found extremely difficult to meet in the short run. First, that publications should be open access, which meant that we had to give up the paying subscriber base that JOMBS had built over 10 years. In that process we would have to sacrifice the most sustainable financial base that the journal possessed, and if we eventually wanted to get it back then it would not be nearly as easy as it had been to give it up. Secondly, and even more importantly, VR demand that funded journals shall be ISI ranked and included in Thomson Reuter's Web of Science. In social sciences we all know how few journals actually get included – in the field of communication it is to date 78 journals globally ranked by Thomson Reuters, as a comparison Elsevier's Scopus ranks 235 well established communication journals, and still there is a vast number of good journals who are not picked up by either of these indexes. Unverified estimations have been made that around 10% of all academic journals make it into the Web of Science. JOMBS is currently ranked by Elsevier's Scopus but not by the Thomson Reuter's Web of Science. So as much as we would like to become listed by Thomson

Reuters, we did not see this as a realistic achievement in the short run. Besides, we did not see that a move to open access would make the road to the SSCI significantly easier – rather the contrary. For that reason, the VR option appeared unrealistic.

2. Option 2. An open access publisher. Over the years, the journal had been approached by various publishers who had offered their services. Some of them were so called open access publishers, meaning that that could assist in solving some of the production-related challenges of JOMBS. However, we did not find that they provided any solution to the desired independence of JOMBS from MMTC. Though open access publishers provide material for free to readers, they would still need to recover the production costs from some other source, and that responsibility would still lie in the hands of the MMTC. Further, though we sympathized with the idea that the results of publicly financed research should be made publicly available, we were not convinced that open access, at least at this point, would benefit the academic status and impact of the journal.

3. Option 3. A commercial publisher. The offers made by commercial publishers had over the years been turned down for various reasons, but given the need for new competences and technological investments, we felt it was time to reconsider. A commercial publisher would generally not make the publications open for everyone free of charge, but on the other hand, they would value JOMBS' established subscriber base as an asset. The large publishing houses also have the largest production facilities and the widest global representation and reach at conferences, library contacts, indexing services etc. A good deal with a commercial publisher could also solve the financial stability over a long period since the publisher would cover the costs for production, distribution and marketing in exchange for the majority of the subscription revenues. When we started to talk to publishers, it quickly boiled down to the question

whether our current subscriber base and its potential future growth pictured an attractive enough business case for the publishing houses to engage. In the discussions that developed we soon found mutual liking with one of the largest publishing houses, Taylor and Francis, who also happened to have a growing regional office located in Stockholm.

In this phase, we also initiated an initiative to affiliate the journal with an international academic association. We had earlier had contact with the European Media Management Association (EMMA), which is likely the most active and vital research community in the area in the area of media management and economics. In fact, EMMA had, too, been looking for an academic journal that would further solidify their maturity and stature. The proposition offered, was to include a discounted online subscription of JOMBS in EMMA's membership package. This would essentially give the association more visibility and better opportunities to stimulate and direct the academic discussion in the field. An official affiliation of the between the two entities was accepted by the EMMA general assembly during the Tallinn conference in 2014.

After this, things have moved fast. A 5-year publishing contract with Taylor and Francis was signed in late fall 2014, and JOMBS' new website was launched in January 2015. We had by then reviewed the editorial board, the submission policies and the review guidelines. We were also very happy to welcome Ulrike Rohn as associate editor of JOMBS appointed by EMMA. By March 2015 all back issues of the journal had been digitized and made available online. By April the journal was given a total design make-over both on the inside and outside. In May 2015, the first JOMBS issue with Taylor and Francis as publisher was finally released – fittingly a special issue on media convergence from the EMMA conference in Tallinn. It was followed by a second issue just a month later. During summer 2015, production of issue 3 and 4 was started and the new content management system was implemented by October 1st. Together with Taylor and Francis, we are making marketing plans for

the future. In short, in less than a year we have managed to resolve all the identified short term challenges that we had set up.

So is this all as rosy as it seems? Well at the moment we see no reason whatsoever to be regretful, the collaboration with the publisher

has been efficient, and with a majority of the practicalities addressed, our team of JOMBS editors can now focus on what we do best – to engage with you, encourage you to submit your work, and to make it read, discussed, and cited.