

Global Reach

Early next month, I will be making a presentation at the "E-Journal Summit," an event sponsored by the National Academy of Science (NAS) in Washington, DC. It is a pleasure to participate in the summit meeting because the program includes participation from international authorities on trends, issues, and new directions in electronic publishing. Of course, this is an important subject for me because ECS is one of the few not-for-profit society publishers at the forefront of the electronic publishing revolution, and our progress in this activity is critical for our success in satisfying the ECS mission.


My role as a discussion leader at the Summit is to address the question, "Why should and how can a scientific society broaden its global reach?" In preparation for the Summit, I pondered the relevancy of the question, which actually seems quite obvious to me and perhaps even rhetorical for this sophisticated audience. Since the E-Journal Summit focuses on sharing digital information, it seems to me that global reach is not necessarily an "issue," it is simply an obvious evolutionary direction because digital information can be effectively disseminated anywhere in the world where an adequate Internet connection exists. ECS is a scientific society whose mission is to advance electrochemistry and solid-state science, and we advance the science by disseminating current research. Our database indicates that scientists and engineers in approximately 80 different countries are pursuing research activities in our discipline, so the question of "why" we should broaden the global reach is almost irrelevant. ECS has always served the scientific community wherever there is an interest in electrochemistry and solid-state science.

In our particular situation, the global reach of ECS has been broadening since 1930, which is why the ECS Board voted to change our name from the American Electrochemical Society to our current name. Globalization was not a buzzword in 1930, but the ECS leadership was smart enough to realize that we were getting large contributions at our meetings and publications from non-North American scientists. Despite the fact that it has been nearly 78 years since we decided to formally recognize the global contributions to ECS, some have suggested that ECS is still a predominately North American organization. In 2008, that is a difficult argument to support because 53% of the ECS membership now resides outside of the U.S., and a more noteworthy 80% of our journal manuscripts submitted last year were from authors outside the U.S. ECS has acknowledged our important stewardship role in electrochemistry and we have accepted the responsibility to engage scientists and publish research from anywhere in the world that the work has been done.

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Despite our growing international constituency, the question of how a scientific society can broaden its global reach is a relevant question. Again, you do not need to be an expert on electronic publishing to recognize that the ability to disseminate digital knowledge is a pretty effective tool for communicating and connecting to global communities of scientists. We have leveraged the power of e-journals and that has enabled a greater number of author submissions and readership from scientists all over the world. In addition, we have planned collaborative international meetings like PRiME 2008 (see <http://www.electrochem.org/meetings/biannual/214/214.htm>), established joint partnerships with other professional societies from different parts of the world, and finally, we have appointed global representation in the various leadership positions in ECS. These globalization activities have obviously been effective, and I feel confident that the technical interests of the scientist, and not his or her location, is what drives the scientific direction of ECS.

We still expect to make more progress to connect the scientific communities around the globe and to remove the remaining obstacles that will enable complete global participation; but the thrust has clearly been the evolution of digital information and the e-journal and it is amazing how far we have come.


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