

How do academic publishers see their role?

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I do not agree that unaffordable access is a problem for many. Access is a privilege of membership (e.g., being a student at a university), not a right. Can we stop this debate now and simply agree that we have no common ground upon which to base a conversation?



POSTED BY JOSEPH ESPOSITO | MAR 2, 2016, 8:32 PM

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Over the years, publishers have left some astonishingly frank remarks over how they see their role in serving the scholarly community with their communication and dissemination needs. This morning, I decided to cherry-pick some of them, take them out of context to create a completely unrealistic caricature of publishers that couldn't be further from the truth. However, I'll leave the links to the comments, so you can judge for yourself just how out of context they actually have been taken.

Essentially all of these comments were voiced on the blog of the [Society for Scholarly Publishing](#), an organization representing academic publishers. For one of the commenters, Joseph Esposito, it is likely safe to assume that his continued presence as main contributor to the blog means that these viewpoints reflect the general viewpoints of the members of this association closely enough to not warrant dismissal from the site. The other quoted commenter, Sanford Thatcher, is not a contributor to the blog at all, so there is no direct way of estimating how representative his views are. Both commenters are or have been either publishers themselves or consult publishers in various roles.

1. Publishers don't add any value to the scholarly article:

Now you can find an article simply by typing the title or some keywords into Google or some other search mechanism. The Green version of the article appears; there is no need to seek the publisher's authorized version.

[Source.](#)

2. Publishers' business of selling scholarly articles to a privileged few is not negotiable

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Screenshot via [Mike Taylor](#)

3. The purpose of academic publishers is to make money, not to serve the public interest:

It is not the purpose of private enterprises to serve the public interest; it is to serve the interests of their stockholders. On the other hand, it is the purpose of the federal government to serve the public interest.

[Source.](#)

4. Governments ought to serve the public interest by funding all scholarly communication:

you should be urging the government to better disseminate the results of the research it sponsors.

[Source.](#)

Let's take these comments and completely mangle the impression publishers publicly express of themselves: "We don't really have anything of value to contribute, but it is our non-negotiable fiduciary duty to make as much money off the public purse as possible. If you want to change that, you should take all the tax-money we've suckered you into handing over to us and build a sustainable scholarly communication infrastructure yourselves." Couldn't have said it better myself, actually.