# IPA in Conversation with …
# Ian Moss
## CEO, STM
# STM Publishing during the Coronavirus Pandemic
## Conducted by Michiel Kolman, Past President, IPA
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## Transcript

Michiel Kolman: Welcome to the IPA in conversations with and today we're very honored to have Ian Moss the CEO of STM. Welcome Ian.

Ian Moss: Thank you for inviting me. This is my first time on a proper interview so let's hope that it goes well. Thank you very much.

Michiel: Great having you here. So my name is Michiel Kolman. I'm the immediate past president of the IPA and for full disclosure I work for Elsevier which is a member of the STM organization.

So, Ian let me just start immediately with the first question. For outsiders how would you describe the world of academic publishers? What do they actually do and in what way is it different from say trade publishers or education publishers? What makes STM unique in the world of publishing?

Ian: Well obviously your your membership will be the experts on publishing and trade publishing. So, if I describe what STM does then perhaps people can draw their own conclusions about the differences. What I try to say is scholarly publishing is part of this system of research and science it is embedded in the process. It's not an end result from the process but it is part of the way you get from research to what we call the version of record, the verified science. And, although all organizations, all sectors, say that they're complicated I think it is fair to say that is a pretty complicated complex system and publishers are a part of the functioning of the system, making the system kind of work and bind together. So, this means everything from creating and supporting infrastructure to managing the stages of publishing the kind of nuts and bolts and the data tagging and the business models to make the process sustainable. So, actually we are, through these business models, funding a system that supports the research community to maintain standards and ethics. I suppose that would be a headline. Although the output, if you like, is to communicate the research in a way that's accessible to other researchers but also to government, industry and individuals, it is not a simple process of typesetting formats or formatting and editing an article. They first have to select research worthy of publication from thousands of submissions. We need to verify the research, organize peer-review, check for plagiarism, mistakes and the data, make any necessary amendments all before the version of record the public sees. As part of my introductory reading I got to read the Scholarly Kitchen piece on the 60 things that journal publishers do and by 2018 they'd amended it twice to become the 102 things journal publishers do. I think that reflects that as the volume of research grows so does the responsibility of publishers to help find, verify, promote

and maintain the version of record. We at STM are trying to help our members collaborate to achieve those objectives. So that's a headline overview of our industry.

Michiel: You did mention peer review so maybe you can explain that term to our viewers?

Ian: The presence of peer review is an absolutely fundamental part of the system and it is something that publishers, kind of, organize on behalf of the research community. We select the research that we deem worthy of publication at that point, that is only, if you like, the researcher's interpretation of the science. What we need to do then is to test that with other experts to check whether those are the correct conclusions to draw from the the data, or the research, of the experiments or whatever the process is, to make any comments that they think would improve the text or improve the interpretation. That creates a synthesis, if you like, between what we would call a preprint and the version of record. So it helps improve the quality, but it also tests, and this is important part, it tests the science, it verifies that those are the correct conclusions to draw from the evidence that the researcher has identified.

Michiel: If we bring it to what is happening today, where we're in the midst of a pandemic, what was the role or what is the role of academic publishing during COVID-19?

Ian: Our members responded in in the way that they normally do in such situations and move very rapidly to opening access to the the kind of back catalog of articles that are directly relevant. We wrote to our members on 30th January, so I mean although this moved very quickly it was already clear then that this was going to be a global pandemic. We asked our members to make research freely and quickly available and that we would coordinate that effort and organize a hosting platform for that on our website, but also feed that information to the relevant organizations so WHO etc, so everyone knew that that is somewhere they could go for information. Over that very short period of time, by mid-february we had over 32,000 articles and other resources to make findable and usable. We were just looking at the stats this week and there's been a hundred and fifty million downloads of those articles.

Michiel: Amazing.

Ian: If you compare that to book sales… We've compared it to the sales of Grand Theft Auto and you know it's much more than that. There is obviously a deep and wide interest in what is going on but there is also an enormous volume of work there. We could do this because, as I said before, we've invested in platforms, with tagging the information, we are cataloging it, we are preserving it and when someone says we need access to that we can do that very quickly. That is again a fundamental issue here that we deliver a way of, if you like, filing the history of knowledge as publishers publish it

Michiel: And this corpus of work, which is really available, how it been being used? What has the impact been?

Ian: I wouldn't be able to comment on the use of it, I think that that's a that's a difficult thing for me to interpret. I think it has made it available for a very wide audience. What I would reflect on though I think is there has been an enormous number of articles, a lot of (it) experimental, quite a lot of information in the public domain that hasn't been verified, preprints that are being quoted by newspapers. It's a real reminder of the importance of intermediation and verification. The importance of someone saying hang on it might be a breakthrough, it might be a discovery but we need to go through due process. We need to look at the data, we need to have it peer-reviewed, we need to verify, it we need to say this is at the right standard. It's been a real example of that in a fast-moving scientific situation where there were so many unknowns and are still so many unknowns. It

is so easy to try and latch on to something that might be the kind of the quick answer and it's really important we don't miss those stages out. Because if you miss those stages, out in this current situation, we have governments making decisions on the back of research that is wrong. That's an incredible incredibly sensitive situation I think. So, we remind ourselves that we work a pace but we don't miss out any of the steps

Michiel: So, most of your customers are research universities, institutions. They have researchers, they have students. How do you think they have been affected by the lockdown?

Ian: Well, I think I think everybody has experienced both a personal experience but also a shared experience, because it is unprecedented for everyone to have to go through the same thing at the same time globally. That is an extraordinary thing to have happened that so many countries in the world locked down at more or less the same time and so there were no examples to work from. We were working it through together. There is no doubt that the university sector and the education sector generally, and as someone with small children I have very personal experience of this, it has disrupted the education of a generation of children. It has changed the way that people have had to interact with education, with their institutions. It has taken away the personal in the higher education sector, that is an important part of that experience, and I think for all people in all sectors there is a great uncertainty both about very simply the next academic year and , admissions, and deferrals and those sort of questions, but also the kind of economics of all of our sectors. Also, on the upside have we made some breakthroughs here that we will always learn from? Do we need thousands and thousands of people to go to one place for a period of time to interact and learn or is this something that is going to be much more fluid in the future and much more online and much more interactive and and you know on an up side much more collaborative. You will be able to take courses from wherever you went in the world. You'll be able to talk to researchers from wherever you are in the world. Now that's always been the case but now everyone's tried it. Maybe things will change. So, it's uncertain. There's obviously a huge impact but there may also be changes and those are lasting changes.

Michiel: You did mention also the economic downturn, so to say, what are you expecting, for your members, will be the effect?

Ian: Well, we've not faced a challenge like this in my lifetime, if ever, and I don't think anyone else has. There are positive uptick scenarios where we get back to normal very quickly, and the science gets to an answer much quicker than we expect, and you know we return to more normal economic activity quickly. I think the impact on the journal sector this year it's not the question, it is next year and the year after and ongoing. That is not the same for the book publishing side of our members' businesses where the massive fall-off in sales and publishing because of everything from supply chains to points of sale has been dramatic. Obviously quite a few of our members are on both sides of that business and so, if even if journals have an OK year they'll be suffering elsewhere in their business. I think there will be tough times for everybody ahead and I think everyone knows that. In the way we organize as a business operation there'll be many questions going forward as to whether there'll be lasting impact on the way we do business. For instance, we talk about the Frankfurt conference and deals that we've done there and the kind of face-to-face nature of a lot of our interactions and maybe that will never come back in quite the way it was. So, there are all (sorts of) different aspects to this and I think we're preparing for every scenario whilst hoping for the first scenario, which is that actually we can return to normal reasonably quickly, the economy everywhere recovers reasonably quickly because of steps the government's have made and that business returns to some sort of normality.

Michiel: You did mention books and journals. For journals of course there is a well-known subscription model but in the STM community there's also an alternative business models, open access, which is part of a larger movement for open science. Perhaps you could explain a bit. What is this about and how does it affect your members?

Ian: I mean there is a movement within some funders and research communities that research should be made freely available once it's been created, and as we say published, for anyone to access without having to pay a fee to read the article. I think, and our members are open access publishers, it's part of our business. In many ways we are a service to the academic world and if that's what the academic world wants and that's what the funder wants then it's absolutely right and and we provide that. But you know we provide that in a way that maintains those standards that I was talking about. The quality standards. There has always been change. There has always been change in publishing over the course of history and publishers have always responded to that change. There's always been new business models and we've had 20 years of online now. You are not going to go back to a world where science is not freely available and online and shareable. That is the reality. The reality that we have to deal with is how you ensure that that validation process remains. We have learnt enough from the online world to know that intermediation really matters. Verification really matters. Quality standards really matter. The idea that science can be crowd-sourced, that kind of very optimistic view of how people act online I think has shown itself to not be the case. So, you need somebody, some way, to say this this has been checked at the very simplest level. Then there are all the other things I talked about as well that publishers do. The selection in the first place. Putting it in the right kind of journal even if it's not for them they may pass it down the chain. The amendments. The putting the data out there which we're very keen on so that people can can reproduce it. Checking for plagiarism. All those sorts of questions, they still remain and they still have to be funded. So that's a roundabout way of saying, yes, we are absolutely in the world of open access, that is where enormous parts of our business will be in the future. We will be serving that need but that need has to be funded still. It doesn't become free just because you will it to be. The things that matter in that system still have to be funded. It's been fascinating again over this period to see things like reprint services putting very clear messages to say actually this has not been checked. A disclaimer almost. That shows that that processes is worth preserving. Now whether it's preserved in the same way or by the same people, there are no barriers to entry here for other methods of doing this. It's just that I would say that our membership has been doing this for a very long time. It's very efficient. It's very professional. That is not easy to replicate from a standing start.

Michiel: So, at IPA we have two pillars and the first one is about copyright. So, we fight to protect copyright. How is it for STM? Are there any STM specific aspects to copyright?

Ian: Copyright is is the fundamental underpinning, in my view, of freedom speech, if you like. The idea that you can earn a living from your writing, means that you can sustain your writing without recourse to patronage and and all of the constraints that that may bring. Copyright as a right, as a fundamental right, is extraordinarily important to knowledge understanding and freedom of speech and all of those questions. The right of the author not to make their work available is also an important right and their control over that work is an important right. And there are assignment of it and you know all of these questions. To me copyright creates freedom and it recognizes that endeavour has to be rewarded, because people need to earn a living. It's the fundamental underpinning of our business. Without the historical right of copyright there would be no business of publishing. We wouldn't be able to do all those things that I described (publishers) as doing. We absolutely share that common view. I think that some of the open access debate forgets… In fact copyright underpins our system because it includes my right to be able to publish it for free anywhere in the world if I choose to do so. We have very good systems now with with CC BY licenses and not only are you publishing for free but you are saying that is my work I still want to be

acknowledged for what I did but I'm but I'm sharing it with you and I'm allowing you to use it in certain ways. So, we have to defend our members interests from a business point of view because that's the way we invest in all the parts of our role in the science ecosystem. Copyright is not a constraint, it is an enabler. It gives power to the individual to be able to do what they want to do with the work that they have created.

Michiel: I like that term, copyright as an enabler. So, the other pillar of the IPA is that we fight for our freedom to publish. That often goes hand in hand with support for academic freedom. Are there any freedom to publish issues in STM? For instance, is there any censorship of STM publications and how does your organization get involved?

Ian: At a headline level it is obviously incredibly important to us to support academic freedom and freedom to publish and the right as well of the researcher to publish where they wish to publish. I think that sometimes cuts across some of the some of the movements behind funders. I think that funders should be very careful about telling researchers where they can and can't publish because I think academic freedom is incredibly important. As an organization, and I come to this very new still, we've got to get the basics right in membership for representation and so on, and that's absolutely my focus? We tend not to be drawn into campaigning because my perspective of the way that an organization like STM should run is that you stick to your expertise in your area, and support those who have much greater expertise and much greater understanding of the situation. So there are obviously questions of censorship. There are obviously questions of control and freedom that we are of course very concerned about. We would maintain our support for those that are trying to ensure that there is absolute freedom.

Michiel: So, before your time but during my time as IPA president, we had incidents where our publications in China were censored. Academic publications, and Cambridge University Press was really in the eye of the storm, so to say. Any views on that?

Ian: I couldn't get drawn into the specifics because I'm not aware of those specific examples to be honest. You treat these issues on a case by case basis where they come up. There are obviously very different systems of government around the world. Very different social systems and we should be always a slightly wary of imposing a particular point of view on the world. But it is important to our membership and it is important to science to ensure that the best research is published however uncomfortable that may make any administration feel and we do have a role in supporting that because ultimately our objective is not a political one it is, ,if you want to have the kind of movie style sentence, it will be the you know the search for the facts, the search for the record, and that's our objective.

Michiel: You mentioned earlier that these are different date times and you don't know what's gonna happen at Frankfurt, but I'm just curious, how is the STM industry connected during a lockdown?

Ian: Let's start with just a personal basis. I started in mid-december. I've been locked down basically since the 1st of March. For me this is this is how it works, there's never been any different. I had a short period where I was traveling a lot and meeting people. It was such a short pier and so long in history that this is normal. We were already a virtual organization. We closed our physical offices in December to go fully virtual.  So, on the up side from a personal and organizational point of view STM had no continuity issue because we were already completely in that space. We've taken some time during the lockdown to improve our tech, to improve our interactions and get used to a much more collaborative way of working but it's it's been very easy for us, though it's taken away one of the most important aspects for me which is to meet people. Get out there, represent our organization and of course I can do events like this, for which many thanks. I can, in many ways, talk

to a much greater number of people across continents but I think there's just something about the personal interaction that's very important, particularly for me starting out. Meeting people by chance, all of those conversations that are incredibly rich and warm you get on the sidelines. So you know that's my kind of personal reflection from having spent 2/3 of my career in STM sitting in my garden office.

Michiel: IPA, I'm sure, would love to welcome you in Geneva and show all the work we've been doing there with WIPO.

Ian: oh absolutely, I'd love to. The Frankfurt issue, I think it will be hard for a lot of members to plan to take large exhibition space and large numbers of staff out by October. I think that naturally creates a momentum of its own. I personally, as an employer would not feel comfortable at the moment saying to my staff that they had to go to Frankfurt. That obviously affects the way that we would plan for the conference. But it's also really important that we maintain that community that talks to each other. So, we will still have what we call a Frankfurt event. It may not be there are people physically in Frankfurt watching it. We're also thinking of having, rather than just a one-off show, we might have a bit of a box set. So we'll have some little satellite seminars in the lead-up to that conference that that can go a bit deeper into some of the issues that we're all facing and continue the dialogue that way. That gives us an opportunity to try and break out into those little groups of 10, 20 or 30 (people) so there is a bit more interaction rather than the Zoom talk that a lot of people have had to do.

Michiel: Great. Well we all look forward to that. The pre conferences and the conference itself. Thank you so much for this interview. Thank you also for the great collaboration between STM and IPA throughout the year and I'm sure also under your leadership.

Ian: Thank you ever so much for inviting me. It's been an absolute pleasure. Yes, I'm looking forward to getting out to Geneva and meeting everyone. This is both a terrible terrible situation and an incredibly important one for us all to work through together. I think that this is going to be a testing but a really experiential move over the next couple of years. So, thank you very much.

Michiel: Thank you for you views. Thank you.