

USAGE-BASED AUTHOR ROYALTIES – A NEW OA BUSINESS MODEL FROM SCIYO

Jan Erik Frantsvåg

In December 2009 the Croatia-based Open Access publisher Sciyo launched a new model in Open Access publishing - usage-based author royalties.

Sciyo publishes books and journals, and has a standard publishing fee of EUR 470. Details about this are difficult, not to say impossible, to find on their website <http://sciyo.com/>, so these facts are from their promotional material introducing their new model.

The new model is that authors will be paid (which in itself is unusual in scientific publishing) according to the number of readers they attract, as measured by the number of actual downloads. The payment is not very large, EUR 0.02 per download. If the annual amount for an author is less than EUR 100, it will be credited to the author's account with Sciyo and used as part payment on future publishing with Sciyo. If it is EUR 100 or more, it will be paid out to the author's bank account.

Sciyo reports 720 000 downloads over the past year, this volume of traffic could cost them EUR 14 400.

Paying for downloads is a dangerous sport. There are two clear dangers present:

1. That of authors (and their friends and families) downloading articles with no other intent than to create income for the authors.
2. That of competitors downloading articles in order to weaken Sciyo's financial situation.

In addition to that, we will see traffic increases from onlookers curious about the business model, with no real interest in the content itself – like myself.

In order to make their model work Sciyo needs to create strong mechanisms to hinder abusive downloading from authors or competitors.

How will the model work for authors?

An author needs 5 000 downloads in a year to get a payment from Sciyo. Clearly, few authors will reach this threshold. What most authors could hope for is an amount that will reduce future publishing charges, thus making publishing less costly for the author. If the author is planning to publish more with a Sciyo publication, this is favourable to the author. If not, the author will never benefit from this “income” – the

promise to pay will effectively not cost Sciyo anything.

What is in it for Sciyo?

For one thing, this is a model that will create publicity for Sciyo and make libraries, readers and authors aware of their existence and publishing activities. At a price of (a maximum of) EUR 14 400 this is really not very expensive as marketing costs go.

The model will undoubtedly attract authors, though the payment promised is not large enough to make authors choose to publish with Sciyo if this is contrary to other needs. However, it will make Sciyo a more attractive venue of publishing, and this could for some authors or manuscripts tip the scales in favour of Sciyo.

If an author has already published with Sciyo and accrued some credit with Sciyo through downloads, this will make publishing with Sciyo cheaper, and this could also increase the willingness of authors to publish with Sciyo.

The better papers and more read authors will create more income through this model than more inferior papers and less read authors. Thus, authors that will attract readers through the quality of their work and writing will be the ones that will benefit the most from continuing publishing with Sciyo. And these are the authors that Sciyo need to attract and keep as future authors, in order to get a reputation for roadworthiness and quality.

In this way, the major cost for Sciyo will be directed towards keeping the qualitatively best work and best authors coming back to Sciyo to continue publishing, increasing Sciyo's standing. Lesser works and lesser authors will cost Sciyo little or nothing, especially if they do not come back with further papers to be published.

I think OA publishers should follow Sciyo and their model closely, it could be that this is a model more publishers should consider following up in some way or other.



Jan Erik Frantsvåg Universitetsbiblioteket, IT-drift, formidling og utvikling, Universitetet i Tromsø, Norway