Aries Industry Advisory Board

Date: December 6, 2019
Time: 9:00am – 4:30pm
Location: St. Ermin's Hotel - 2 Caxton Street Westminster, London, UK
Attendees:
Aries: **Jennifer Fleet, Tony Alves, Betsy Hopkins, Kate Horgan**
SSRN: **Gregg Gordon**
Industry: **American Chemical Society, American Psychological Association, Brill, Caldera Publishing, Cell Press, John Wiley & Sons, PLOS, Taylor & Francis, Thieme, University of Chicago Press, Wolters Kluwer, World Scientific**

The meeting commenced at 9:04am following breakfast and registration. Jennifer Fleet, Managing Director – Aries Systems welcomed the Board, thanking them for their participation in the third meeting of the AIAB. The AIAB was borne out of the acquisition, but has evolved into an important contributor to Aries' strategic path.

Jennifer reviewed the Ground Rules for the Board and the meeting, including legal guidance and participant guidelines.

Jennifer then discussed the Objectives of the board meetings:
- What can Aries do to advance scholarly communication through technology and process
- Provide a level playing field across all publishers and Aries customers
- Integrate third party solutions
- Provide a forum for both customers and the industry to advise Aries on the extent and messaging of the firewall between Aries and Elsevier

Following was an introduction of Aries staff and Board attendees, along with personal goals for the meeting. Common themes include collaboration among publishers, and exploration of the Author as the Customer.

Betsy provided a recap of the June meeting and key discussion points. The following action items for the Aries team came from the June meeting, with updates provided:
- Work on communication plan for reaching out to board with monthly updates: Monthly notices are sent on the 15th of each month to Board members. Content includes updates on Aries action items, information on the next meeting, and other information for the Board. The Board had no suggestions for improvement and find the communications helpful.
- Revisit principles with regard to transparency discussion: Jennifer addressed this later in the meeting.

Board attendees requested the following:
- Announcement of board meeting dates as soon as they are available. Betsy announced that the June 2020 meeting will be in Boston on June 19.

Jennifer Fleet presented a Business Update:

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- Lyndon Holmes officially retired in September 2019, and is no longer working in any advisory role with Aries or Elsevier.
- Jennifer's title has changed from Chief Operating Officer to Managing Director to be in alignment with other Senior Management within Elsevier.
- Jennifer again reports to Olivier Dumond at Elsevier, who is based in London, UK. Aries continues to be under the Research Products branch of Elsevier.
- Jennifer is currently hiring for a Director of Marketing to fill a void left by Richard Wynne when he left the organization. Over the past year, there has been a noticeable shift in the industry from viewing Aries as a small company who had to prove our stability and reliability to viewing us as a company that is supported by a larger organization, allowing Aries to devote more of our marketing strategy to industry initiatives and less to proving our worth. A Director of Marketing will assist in focusing that messaging.

Jennifer continued by presenting Aries' response to the request for greater transparency at the June meeting:
- At the last meeting we reviewed our Guiding Principles and discussed the guide for sharing and communication. It was raised that Gregg Gordon was present, and the question of his role and how it relates to the Principles was raised.
- Jennifer presented further detail on how we are putting these Principles to work.

  1. Customer-specific information needs to be kept confidential (within Aries).
     - All specific disclosures or interactions between Aries/Elsevier/customer must be formalized with a three-party nondisclosure agreement. This Includes provisions for named individuals to be part of the conversation.
  2. Aries will adopt Elsevier Technology standards with local Aries administrators wherever customer-confidential information is involved.
     - Aries will adopt technology standards that will be beneficial, but management and access will be limited only to Aries staff.
     - Where appropriate, Aries will leverage Elsevier contacts for input on best practices, etc., but no client-specific information will ever be shared.
  3. Aries and Elsevier need to visibly and proactively demonstrate that it is keeping all customer-specific information confidential.
     - Aries is developing automated systems for internal administration of invoicing that will also provide top-line financial data only to Elsevier. Aries continues to administer all contracts internally.
  4. All communication and branding should be "Aries" to visibly and proactively demonstrate that the day-to-day business operations are separated.
     - Aries remains a separate legal entity with Jennifer as Managing Director of Aries.
  5. All Aries customers have an equal opportunity to develop and enhance their own submission environments.
     - Elsevier has access to the same development roadmap as Aries presents to all clients at advisory board or user group meetings.
     - Elsevier has a funded development team (an option available to all clients), though overall prioritization of new features is at the discretion of the Director of Product Management (Tony Alves).

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- There are currently two major Elsevier projects underway: Migration of all Elsevier titles to Editorial Manager, and the Acquisition Integration. The above Principles and what they mean are known by all participants in those two projects.
- Gregg Gordon is involved as a resource for Jennifer as she navigates the acquisition and how Aries can continue to work in the Elsevier sphere, and he also is a resource for Jake Kelleher (Director of Sales) to develop new sales ideas.
- As discussed in June, an escalation framework has been put in place in the event of a perceived breach or violation of these principles:
  - Aries employee reports it to their supervisor
  - Aries management team is notified
  - Jennifer Fleet, Managing Director then sends notifications (if necessary) to:
    - Aries Industry Advisory Board
    - Senior Vice President and Global General Counsel of Elsevier (Jan Bij de Weg)
- Examples of items to be raised to the Board include, but are not limited to:
  - Detailed financial disclosures rather than top-level detail
  - Contract terms that identify specific customer competitive detail without that customer's consent
  - Elsevier access to non-Elsevier people or publisher data

Additional conversations included:
- Elsevier does not have any other business units like Aries, which is why defining these Principles and how they are applied is an ongoing discussion. Elsevier management is incredibly thoughtful on how to make this relationship work the right way for all clients.
- In drafting the Principles, Aries and Elsevier worked through possible scenarios that would violate the Principles and took action to prevent those scenarios. These include designated office space for Elsevier employees within Aries offices that have internal network access completely disabled. The "ethical hacking" audit was also a direct result of these principles.
- Aries is also careful of "softer" breaches as well; should any client ask if other clients have used a feature or explored a strategy, we are cautious to not share other client names without express permission.
- Aries has proceeded with having a SOC 3 audit, and the report will be posted publicly on our website when it is finalized.

Tony Alves continued the meeting with the Development Roadmap and Strategic Initiatives:
- Our primary product is Editorial Manager, which has been used by thousands of journals for many years. Beyond that, we also have ProduXion Manager, a production tracking tool that integrates with EM.
  - Task Manager is a separately licensed "task management" module
  - Commerce Manager is a separately licensed integrated e-commerce tool (not APCs)
  - Our newest product is LiXuid Manuscript; separately licensed XML-based workflow tools
- Our development principles remain the same: EM is built on a single code base architecture, with all business rules stored at the database level, not in the source code. All development is available for all clients to use, making the system highly configurable.
- Development ideas come from multiple sources, including user meetings, industry events and initiatives, and client requests.

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- Aries has created, and recently hired for a new position, a UI/UX designer, to assist in reviewing the Interface and User Experience of the entire system. Though he is an Aries resource, he will have access to Elsevier tools and teams for consultation.
- Over the next year, we will be shifting from two releases per year to an accelerated feature delivery with new features released every month. We will continue to release feature in the "off" position so clients can enable them as desired. One key benefit to this will be the faster delivery of client-funded features.
- Some of the Strategic Initiatives we have undertaken are being released in v16.1, with more to come in 17.0 and beyond. These include:
  - APIs: a general one, APIs to integrate repositories into the Author workflow, and APIs to allow manuscript evaluation tools to integrated with EM.
  - Batch Configurations
  - Cross-Publication functions via Enterprise View ProduXion Manager
  - LiXuid – our XML based workflow
- Additionally, we are seeing some industry trends and starting to respond to those, such as Gradual Engagement – Author as customer, Transparent Peer Review, Peer Review Diversity, FAIR Data, etc.

Board attendees requested the following:
- Consideration of extending Enterprise View to the Editorial side, not just PM
- Clarification of which new features are Elsevier funded

The Board broke for lunch, and returned with a Future Preview of the State of the Industry from Kent Anderson:

- Kent delivered a talk with the theme of "Fixing what's broken". Topic areas included:
  - The role of the Publisher as trusted intermediary, and whether that is fully embraced by publishers
  - Is the role of the Publisher to serve the information consumers or the information producers
  - The role and value of peer review, and whether preprint servers subvert the role and value of peer review

Additional conversations included:
- Larger publishers with higher subscription costs are targets for questions of credibility with regard to cost versus quality of the peer review process.
- Whether it be preprint servers, blogs, news sources, it is incumbent on sources to internally review content before posting it. The fact of posting won't change, so how best to get ahead of it?
- Need better messaging on the value of peer review. There may be value in making it more visible and transparent, but would this help recognition of the value, or result in more trolling and lawsuits?
- Open Access is not just a business model, but there are also moral and social aspects to it that need analysis.
- Copyrights are not fully understood by Authors, which can lead to information being reused without authors understanding. They are looking to have their information available for

anybody to read, but frequently authors are swept up into the CCBY and they don't really understand the implications.
- How can publishers as the trusted intermediary do a better job of addressing these issues?

The meeting then transitioned to facilitated discussion with the board as a whole on the following topic areas:

China:
- Quality of research is improving. There is still room for reviewer improvement and reviewer recognition. There is also room for encouraging Editors to take the risk on new reviewers; their chance of accepting the request to review is very high.
- Some Editors are hesitant to work with authors where English is not a first language. Some Editors are also concerned about the possibility of censorship of important information.
- The Board suggested that an Aries investment in better infrastructure would be helpful to enable the building of relationships inside China. Speed does tend to be a challenge for Chinese users.
- Consensus is that China does need to be a priority.

How to diversify the Reviewer Pool:
- Institutional bias continues to exist, but some Board members reported that intentional diversity on Editorial Boards influences intentional diversity in Reviewers. Even when the intentional effort is made, the challenge can be finding that diversity without dragging out the review process.
- Some approaches that have helped in changing the editorial bias are tying Editor goals to diversity goals, establishing Editor and assistant Editors as a way of mentoring, or intentionally allowing each Editor a time to report at the Board Meetings. Early and frequent Editor engagement can also allow for expanded views.

How to implement new standards for submission process:
- The Board agrees it sounds good, but the realities are it is a struggle. Many Editors are attached to their submission questions, citation styles, formatting, etc. Even metadata, which can standardize information, has catches.
- Even at the baseline level, there is disagreement on whether Authors should be required to format on initial submission rather than on revision or at acceptance. Standardizing would prove problematic as well.

How to deal with image manipulation:
- The Board agreed that this is becoming more of a concern. Currently, the primary tools are visual checking and PhotoShop, though there is a need for more tools to be available.
- For future meetings, maybe inviting third party vendors with tools in this area might be helpful, not as a forum for selling but as an educational effort.

Discussion continued, led by Kate Horgan. Topic areas included:
- Collaboration: There are many views of what collaboration means. Meetings like this allow for publishers to share differing views, similar struggles, and to share ideas. But other collaborations are on the technology side, such as the MECA initiative.

One area for collaboration: revisit what peer review means in the 21st century. Submission systems today are electronic versions of the print process in many ways.

- Industry Standards: Adoption of standards, such as ORCID, Ringold, etc., can lead to easier collaboration; use of a common language sets the stage for collaboration. It can also feed AI efficiency, which gets closer to the common submission concept. The acceptance of standards has improved across the past 10 years in the industry.
  Some standards, such as CredIT, can lead to more submission requirements. The question then arises about how much is being put on the Author, and whether more can be asked at the point of a revision, or maybe even in a parallel path while the submission is undergoing peer review.
- UI/UX updates and discussion: A year ago at the first board meeting, there was some discussion about moving from text-based interface to graphics. As mentioned by Tony earlier in the meeting, Aries has recently completed a year-long search for a UI/UX person, and they will be starting in late December. This will lead to a lot of conversations over the next few months on the user experience (UX) and the interface (UI). Updating the interface has historically been of lower priority at Aries than providing new features, but now we can do both. Aries will have updates on the progress in this area at the June meeting.
- Elsevier Success Metrics at acquisition: The Board asked what these metrics were. Key factors were around customer retention, successful migration of Elsevier titles to EM, employee retention and satisfaction. Jennifer is happy to report that our customers have stayed and our employees have stayed. With the introduction of the Guiding Principles, there are now fewer questions from clients than we often heard pre-acquisition on the state of and future of the company, etc.
- Thoughts on adding a user survey: Some Aries clients have customer surveys and they occasionally share the results with Aries. The Board was asked how they might feel if Aries embedded a link so a survey on a submission page, inquiring about suggested changes to instructions, interface, etc. General consensus was that this might be interesting, especially if the results could then be shared with the publishers.

The meeting concluded with the following wrap up and action items for Aries staff:
- The next meeting will be held June 19, 2020 in Boston, Massachusetts at the W Hotel
- At the next meeting, Aries will provide updates on China connectivity progress, UI/UX progress, and updates on the SOC 3 audit.
- The Board was invited to reach out if they wish to assist in the testing process underway with China connectivity, or if they have any thoughts on future topics they would like us to cover at future meetings.
- Distribute notes form meeting for board review
- Distribute reimbursement process information
- Continue monthly communications

Meeting concluded around 4:15pm and moved to cocktails, canapés, and conversation until 6pm.