

Aries Industry Advisory Board

Date: June 4, 2021

Time: 9:00am – 12:30pm ET

Location: Zoom

Attendees:

Aries: Jennifer Fleet, Mathew Beevers, Brianna Bowen, Betsy Hopkins, Kate Horgan, Nick Paolini, Nathan Westgarth

Industry: Thieme, ASCE, Springer Nature, UCP, World Scientific, APA, Cell Press, American Chemical Brill, Sage

The meeting commenced at 9:00am US-Eastern. Jennifer Fleet, Managing Director – Aries Systems welcomed the Board, thanking them for their participation in the virtual meeting of the AIAB. The Board last met virtually in December 2020 due to the pandemic.

Jennifer began with an introduction of Aries staff and Board attendees, along with personal goals for the meeting. Common themes included connections within the industry, learning more about Aries' new developments and updates, interest in the impacts of the pandemic, and learning about the facilitated discussion topics related to diversity and inclusion.

Jennifer then reviewed the Ground Rules for the Board and the meeting, including legal guidance and participant guidelines, followed by a review of the Guiding Principles established between Elsevier and Aries.

She then provided a recap of the December 2020 meeting and key items for follow-up from the Aries team:

- Accessibility: Matt Beevers and Nick Paolini are here today to talk about this point.
- Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity: We distributed the Tech Overview to the Board after the December meeting, but some additional information will be covered today. Aries new Director of Operations will join us at our next meeting.
- Data Salon: Nathan Westgarth will discuss in further detail during his presentation.

Jennifer addressed these items in her presentations (see further information below).

Jennifer discussed opportunities in which Aries can gain efficiencies by capitalizing on Elsevier shared resources specifically around helpdesk, administration, 24/7 and infrastructure support. All while maintaining customer confidentiality and data security/privacy and remaining dedicated to Aries/Elsevier's rigid Guiding Principles.

Next followed an Aries Business Update covering the following topics:

- Business in 2021
 - COVID-19 continues to dominate our business outlook
 - Aries saw incredible growth in 2020 due to initial spike in COVID submissions but has since trailed off.

- Work from home and work-life balance has become blurred in many ways. Conversation was had around the impact on teams such as burnout.
- Staff Travel
 - Most members of the Board will not resume travel until early 2022 with few expectations for internal meetings.
- Current Priorities
 - Innovations: Innovations include our ongoing LiXuid workflow and leveraging 3rd party integrations through APIs.
 - Improve user happiness: Focusing on enhancing Aries UX/UI for EM and PM
 - Return to office: Aries is working on a plan for return to office.
 - Developing talent: Aries is very focused on supporting new talent and growing and developing our current talent.
 - Marketing Strategy: A heavy focus on further collaboration and enhanced marketing.
 - Core Values: Aries spent time defining its core values to better support and enhance our mission and vision which helps provide context both for internal and external stakeholders.
- Business Continuity
 - Aries leverages RELX resources for this through a mobile app that allows us to manage incident communication. It enables all Aries employees to communicate and receive push notifications on their mobile devices.
 - An app is available to aid contact tracing and in-office reservations during the pandemic.
- DR and Redundancy
 - 42 load-balanced web servers that provide the interface to EM and PM
 - Load-balance = a tool that ensures no one webserver is carrying too much traffic. Our automatic web balancers allow the data to spread appropriately
 - 13 data server clusters
 - Data storage is mirrored to a disaster recovery center to protect data in real-time. Hardware and software are located at the disaster recovery center
- Further Redundancy
 - Several different modes of back up and power through NaviSite and disaster recovery data centers. We have multiple internet providers as well.

Matt Beevers, UX/UI Designer at Aries, presented on the UX/UI project methodology and updates:

- Matt introduced himself and reviewed UX/UI project methodology by first explaining the differences between UX versus UI.
- The UX Process is iterative, it's never complete, and is performed in different phases.
- He then went on to review the phases:
 - Understand – This is an internal step. What are the business goals? Who are we Designing for? What is the current workflow?
 - Research Phase – Learn from users of the system. How they use the system, what are their workflows and pain points? This step is completed through interviews, surveys, and additional research methods like testing. Accessibility is heavily involved in this phase through user experience.
 - Design Phase – Explore content and organizations through, Prototypes, wireframes, putting research to use.
 - Develop Phase – Finalize and optimize designs for release and work with internal teams to make use of benchmarks.

- Deliver Phase – Release designs for end users and if necessary revisit previous steps.
- Aries focus for 2021 is on high traffic pages and workflows that have received the most user feedback and have the largest impact on the experience within EM while caring for accessibility standards.
- Matt then previewed some of the changes coming: Nav Bar, and the Author & Reviewer Menus.

Nick Paolini, Business Systems Analyst at Aries, presented on Accessibility at Aries.

- He led the discussion with an overview of accessibility and the focus of inclusion through accessibility.
- He provided examples of accessibility and walked the group through ways to measure accessibility including:
 - The WCAG guidelines. He stated that Aries is adopting these as part of our accessibility standards within EM and PM.
 - VPAT = Voluntary Product Accessibility Template
- Aries Accessibility Roadmap:
 - Continue to instill accessibility best practices
 - Improve existing functionality
 - Accessibility improvements to the Author Experience
 - Implement accessibility automation
 - User testing

Nathan Westgarth, Vice President of Product Management at Aries, presented Aries Product Roadmap Overview.

- Nathan introduced himself, having just joined Aries in early 2021.
- Aries' delivery and release changes
 - Includes paring down features into smaller parts, and also pivoting as needed. Looking for more input from our users as we develop. We have heard from clients that they might not be able to keep up with our accelerated roadmap so we will continue to work on this adaptation.
- Roadmap Themes for 2021 (some work on the 2021 roadmap will continue into 2022 and beyond):
 - User Interface and User Experience: Focusing on modernizing our system to enhance performance and experience. Current priorities: modernizing the primary navigation, Author and Reviewer main menus, Reviewer invitation workflows, and accessibility improvements to meet WCAG 2.2 AA compliance.
 - Third-party integrations: Enabling an ecosystem of third-party services and tools for EM/PM. Maintenance updates for existing APIs
 - Performance Improvements: Redesigning and refactoring priority slow pages and workflows, increasing web server and asynchronous job capacity, migrating away from legacy technology, migrating services to the cloud, allowing for adaptable scaling to handle peak loads, and modernizing the EM/PM application architecture.
 - Recent improvements:
 - New load balancers installed late 2020
 - Precompile cache issues resolved
 - Additional database server capacity

- Future improvements: Refactored key pages and workflows live in production, new asynchronous job servers, migrate BLOB (Binary Large Objects) storage and Near archive to the cloud
 - Workflow enhancements: Shielding deep email links into the product with a forced login requirement, restricting shared cross journal EAR reports, and page anchors to help users that currently would lose their place in a long list of results or tables if they go back to that page
 - Institutional Identifier matching – hearing that improvements would be beneficial for clients.
 - LiXuid Manuscript: Development continues with the introduction of XML Workflow via production tasks, including an integrated editing tool, and an auto-pagination tool being released in 2021.
- 2022 and Beyond: We expect to be continuing with many of the same themes from 2021.
 - Migration to the cloud. More focus expected on cloud migration efforts and modularization. Increasing security and simplifying the product wherever possible, for faster product development in the future, along with of course an improved user experience. Allows for automating product releases to enable a higher product release cadence.
 - Additional third-party integrations: Continuing to onboard new partners and services across all our existing API / application ecosystem. Potential to expand into re-submission manuscript services (grammar / language support services) and gender, race, and ethnicity data collection.
 - Workflow enhancements: Supporting cross-site configurations and reporting across multiple EM sites. Potentially expanding Enterprise View to additional folders and working on improvements to our Production Status Grid. Expanding batch-wise actions further.

Facilitated Discussion on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion in Scholarly Publishing led by Alice Meadows, Director of Community Engagement, NISO & President Elect, SSP.

- Alice started by sharing working definitions of diversity, inclusion, equity, and accessibility
- Why does DEI matter in scholarly publishing?
 - Enables problem solving
 - Contributes to robust learning environments
 - Moral and ethical obligation as well
 - Diversity, inclusivity, and equity – the big picture
 - Scholarly publishing is not diverse
 - Lack of geographical diversity here
 - Scholarly publishing is not inclusive or welcoming to all.
 - Peer review is not geographically inclusive either.
 - Scholarly publishing is not equitable. There is underrepresentation of women in the industry's most senior positions.
 - Achieving equity is really challenging. Example shared: UK requirement for companies over a certain size to share gender pay gap information publicly

- The current shift
 - Openness and transparency is key.
 - There is a shift in diversity and inclusion today. What can we do as an organization and as individuals? All male panels, ensuring DEI in hiring, leadership, and events and conference speaking opportunities.

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

- Benchmarking and measurement:
 - One of the biggest challenges is around benchmarking and figuring out where we are as a community. How do we measure this? Is it upstream? Do we survey after the fact? Struggling with how to measure this.
 - How to measure while being comprehensive and still respecting privacy. It would be helpful if as a community, vendors like Aries could serve as a partner to help with benchmark marking.
- How can we make an impact?
 - All scholarly publishers want to do something but don't know what to do.
 - Some working groups have begun this work. There needs to be agreements within the community to be open about sharing with one another on what data is being collected and how it's going.
- How open and honest are your submission guidelines and process?
 - All are trying to ensure guidelines and processes for submission are inclusive but recognize that it probably still is not easy enough. There is always room to be better.
 - What specifics can Aries help with to better support and facilitate this transparency within EM to really allow for access to policies?
 - Understanding the user experience – understand where we lacking in transparency and actually see where users are experiencing that within the system.
 - Help make people feel like they know what is going on. Ensure the process is not stressful.
 - Aries is looking to better serve users in this as well.
- Recognizing and minimizing bias. What do you have in place to reduce bias?
 - Implement more training models for Editor and Reviewers.
 - Trying to make the Reviewer pool more diverse as they are struggling with bias.
 - Does artificial intelligence add to this bias? There is an opportunity to add algorithms and recommendations for AI to be more inclusive and less bias to enhance the recommendations within the tools. If you train a tool on the data set that is inherently biased it's going to continue to be biased?
- How can be more inclusive?
 - Interview process and the results have not aligned with those efforts. Trying to hire based more on skill sets than experience which is more difficult and harder to define.
 - Candidates are not on all the same places we are. Consider remote working opportunities. Pandemic has shown us we don't always have to be in the office and that allows us to be more flexible and inclusive of hiring and will continue to hire and cast the net much broader in order to increase diversity in the workforce.
 - Pay entry-level candidates more competitive salary and don't require internships.

The meeting concluded with the following wrap up and action items for Aries staff:

- Cover the following topics at the next meeting:
 - Introduction to Aries Director of Operations, Len Bellemore

The meeting concluded around 12:23pm US-Eastern.