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Going for gold - opportunities for libraries towards opening access to information: a perspective from the Stellenbosch University

The mission of the Stellenbosch University is to create and sustain, in commitment to the academic ideal of excellent scholarly and scientific practice, an environment within which knowledge can be discovered, can be shared, and can be applied to the benefit of the community. During 2010 the University signed the Berlin Declaration to Open Access to Knowledge in the Science and the Humanities to demonstrate its support for opening access to information, in order for knowledge to be discovered, shared and applied to the benefit of not only our own community, but communities from all over the world. Access to scholarly research has unfortunately become a very expensive commodity from which only a privileged few currently benefit. Africa being a developing country suffers greatly because higher education institutions and libraries cannot afford subscribing to very expensive databases in which research articles are published. This exact problem lead to the Stellenbosch University exploring alternative ways to improve open access to research information – one way through archiving a copy of each research item produced by members of its community on its institutional repository, SUNScholar, and another way through publishing journals in open access format on OJS (Open Journals Systems) open source software.

The libraries' central position enables it to act as a primary catalyst for change in the scholarly communication domain. In this paper we would like to address publishing open access journals as an alternative way for specifically academic libraries to open access to research output, thereby contributing to the need for access to quality and high level research information by especially African countries. This is also commonly referred to as the "gold route" to opening up access to information.

Libraries have always had the role to provide and facilitate access to information. They understand the culture of scholarship and are strategically well positioned to approach publishing from a different perspective (OJS @ Queen's). As part of its strategic plans and following the success of the repository, the Stellenbosch University library has decided to embrace the gold route to open access. Where previously commercial publishers were the only ones providing the infrastructure to publish journals, the digital age has made it possible for libraries to adopt a similar role. In this paper we would like to demonstrate that it is possible for libraries to also fulfil the role of a publisher, and disseminate information as widely possible. Reference will be made to the roles and responsibilities involved, the importance of digital preservation, and value libraries can add in an effort to increase the visibility and impact of research published in these journals. The paper will be concluded with recommendations on how you can take the lead within your organisation, and how to go about to implement a similar service at your home institution.

Primary author: Ms SMITH, Ina (Stellenbosch University)

Presenter: Ms SMITH, Ina (Stellenbosch University)