



SIGNALING GATEWAY: NATURE PUSH FORWARD TO NEXT STAGE

** Nature has now launched the Molecule Pages within its managed portal environment, so now it will be possible to judge whether this does represent a new STM publishing format in its own right.*

by David Worlock, Chairman

You can put a tick in the trend analysis boxes for almost every aspect of Signaling Gateway: it is Open Access, free at the point of use, fully peer-reviewed, and uses DOIs to reference and cite findings. But does it add up to a new publishing structure, or is it simply an elegant one-off, a hybrid response to unique scientific research requirements? The arrival of the Molecule Pages provides a first opportunity to assess this. Nature has now gathered third party data on 3500 molecules, and has annotated around 800 of these with short author-created summaries. They now begin the business of investing rich, highly structured author-created data, and putting it through anonymous peer review. So a core online database service, created through collaborative author effort, gathers the authority of peer-reviewed articles as it builds.

The circumstances that have created Signaling Gateway are far from rare. There are now bodies of fast moving science where collaborative data sharing, and the annotation and review of results of work in progress, is essential if the sheer logistical problems of multi-institutional research are to be solved. In contexts where scientists must be aware of findings on the next narrow front to theirs – and react to them – these collaborative database models are going to be vital. Nature's points out that cells have as many moving parts as a jumbo jet but are smaller than a human hair. The long-term aim of the data collaboration and peer review is to create a virtual human cell as a simulation, so for once the independent, editorial integrity function of the publishing is not a sort of handmaiden at the flank of science, but genuinely one of the moving parts as the mechanism moves forward.

There is convincing evidence here that a new publishing form is emerging, and the beginnings of arguments about its ability to be replicated in different disciplines and domains. What has gone unremarked however is the effect that all of this will have on further publishing industry consolidation in this sector. There are unlikely to be two rival Signaling Gateways. The very essence of scheme is that it brings together all of the publishing activity in the sector, and places it in the hands of one contracted publisher. This argues for greater concentration and specialisation, and fewer and larger publishers. And the valuation of players who 'own' the key domains becomes inflated accordingly, though investors will worry about other parts of the new model – margins dictated by sponsorship alignment and data licensing and resale potential, or contract renewal and re-negotiation. Yet in an STM world seemingly obsessed with Open Access and OAI, it is good to be able to report new ways of working with scholarly authors moving through to fruition.

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Signaling Gateway: <http://www.signaling-gateway.org>

Molecule Pages: <http://www.signaling-gateway.org/molecule>

FROM THE EPS ARCHIVE

Nature: Signalling Gateway is the door to the future, EPS Insights, 30 July 2003
<http://www.epsltd.com/accessArticles.asp?articleType=1&updateNoteID=990>