

Editorial

The electronic journal

The explosive drive into computer technology makes me wonder what will become, in future years, of the printed dental journal as we know it today?

Will we, five or ten years from now, still be relying on published paper journals for the necessary information to remain current in the field? Or will we be turning more and more to our computers, equipped with CD-ROM capability, for the latest in published dental articles? Will our offices have rows and rows of compact discs instead of journals in the book shelves?

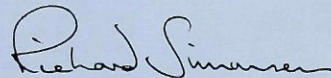
It is of course not possible to predict the course that the profession will choose and that the publishing industry will embrace. The electronic journal, with its ability to connect to libraries or subscription services to allow the user to browse and search through voluminous amounts of material with relative ease, is already here in medicine. How well it will be accepted, and whether it is economically feasible for publisher and reader, is still uncertain at this time.

There is a certain sense of security in reading through the familiar format and sensing the familiar feel of the glossy paper of a journal such as *Quintessence International*. As long as the majority in the profession is computer illiterate, the convenience and tradition of browsing through journals, until one happens upon an article of great interest, will continue. And while the electronic world offers huge advantages in search of references and authors' names, it cannot match the speed with which one can refer to an article in a known location in a certain journal. For example, even though I have found the maintenance of my daily calendar and all addresses, phone numbers, etc on my personal computer to be a tremendous advantage in terms of organization, security, speed of searching for partially-forgotten names, etc, it does sometimes seem foolish to have to turn on a computer, wait while it warms up, open the appropriate program, and only then be able to look up a telephone number that probably would have been committed to memory, or certainly to an easily accessible address book, in the days of old.

Cost also becomes an obvious disadvantage. I don't know if you ever stop to think how little you actually pay for a color journal with information from the knowledge and experience of 10 or more different groups of authors from around the world each month. If not, you should—and then compare it to the cost of just one continuing education program. Certainly one could pay a lifetime subscription to *QI* for a fraction of what it may cost to get set up into an electronic system, without even considering the annual additional costs for CD-ROM, or electronic subscription services that accrue on an ongoing basis.

Another hurdle yet to be overcome for the electronic journal is that of the quality of illustrations. While *QI* has been the leader in quality color publication in the dental field over the last 25 years, the technology to match the quantity and quality of a year's issues on CD-ROM is challenging easily accessible in terms of memory capability and reproduction quality.

Seeking intellectual gratification at the computer terminal may well be in the future for many of us—*QI* on my computer sounds appealing to me! But for those of us well into middle age, it seems impossible that we will see the demise of the printed journal. What we need to do is to be supportive of change while insisting that quality, cost, and convenience are all addressed before any leap into the electronic world is embraced.



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