

Pay-for-knowledge: That other obstacle to internet information

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'The internet has made it so much easier to find what you want to know.' I suppose that's mainly true but I can't help wondering how long it will last, given that publishers have worked out how to charge internet users for the release of scholarly information.

In my line of business (musicology of the mass media) there are two ways in which publishers obstruct access to knowledge. One is by denying researchers the right to quote from audiovisual work under copyright; the other is by charging students and colleagues large amounts to read learned articles online. Having previously dealt with the audiovisual copyright issue,¹ I'll stick here to the 'other obstacle', to *the pay-for-knowledge problem*. My critical view of this issue did not originally stem from ideas or principles but from practical experience.

I have taught various aspects of popular music in tertiary education since 1971. There has never been much by way of ready course material in the subjects I taught and I used to waste inordinate amounts of time and forest producing handouts in badly ventilated photocopying rooms. However, between September 1999, when I started using the internet for teaching purposes, and May 2001, when my site became fully operational, my time at the photocopier fell from an average of two or three hours a week to zero. Putting course material on the web also meant that students unable to come to class no longer needed to ask for the handout they'd missed and that I no longer had to manage piles of handout back issues. The web also allowed me to let others access materials that I had presented in guest lectures or at conferences. I could also publicly express opinions, like these, about other matters than those strictly associated with my academic specialities.

With the increasing costs of book production and the scarcity of teaching materials (for other publishing reasons)² in my type of work, colleagues across the world now find it easier to run courses involving the analysis of music in the audiovisual media because their students can download, read, view and listen to the materials I produce. As long as I can survive from other sources of revenue I don't see why I should have to wait for publishers to catch up with the times on matters of copyright concerning mass media analysis materials. Nor do I see why students should have to pay for what I produce any more than they should pay to learn about Euclidean geometry, irregular verbs or Marxism.

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1. See *Copyright Matters on this site* <www.tagg.org/infowhy.html#Copyright>, *YouTube Counterclaims* <www.tagg.org/YouTubeFox0710.html> and *Copyright vs. the Democratic Right to Know* <www.tagg.org/articles/wipout.html>.
 2. See sources listed in footnote 1.

These are the reasons why, since 2000, I have insisted on keeping control of the rights to anything I produce. I see no valid reason why a company wanting to publish something I've written should be given total control over the flow of ideas and information I put together and, using that mechanism of 'free' enterprise, block the free flow of information to those who can't afford 'first-world' prices. I consistently avoid pay-for-knowledge sites on the internet and I would urge colleagues to do the same. I think it's plain wrong and anti-democratic to make money —or, worse, to allow commercial third parties to make money— from the knowledge we produce if that knowledge is not in real terms equally available to all. *Until pay-for-knowledge ventures implement realistic global pricing compatible with the fact that 80% of humanity lives on less than \$10 a day they should be boycotted.* As academics we should try to avoid citing or referring to pay-for-knowledge articles and we should definitely not sign away publishing rights to pay-for-knowledge ventures.

Admittedly, I'm in my sixties with more than enough 'career' already behind me. That means I can much more readily apply the principles just mentioned than can young academics who still need to make their mark in relation to the institutional structures on which they depend for their income. Their work (not mine!) has to appear in reputed peer-reviewed journals issued by established 'first-world' publishing companies whose operations can cost a lot of money. If these companies, profit-making or not, cover their running costs from mainly pay-for-knowledge sources, they can never be globally democratic. If, however, they were to derive income from public and international funds, the picture would change. Moreover, online peer-reviewed journals could be set up by members of specific academic communities, journals whose minimal running costs could be covered by academic association membership fees which could in their turn be structured in accordance with the cost-of-living index in the nation of residence of each member (as IASPM). If established pay-for-knowledge companies can't be persuaded to take such steps (unlikely!) it's up to members of the relevant academic community to do so.