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The BMIF Journal's Online Peer Review System

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Abstract

We are in the course of a major paradigm shift from printed to electronic in all stages of the research process, and this is the de facto standard for printed research such as journal or conference papers. In the last decade a lot of new peer review software systems have been developed and their support for this significant shift is critical to editors of conference proceedings and journals. These systems allow uploading of the submitted papers, assignation of papers to reviewers, management of interaction between editors and both authors and reviewers, editing proceedings or journal issues and so on. In this paper we present a journal peer review system, which has been developed to support our editorial work for the BMIF Journal. The system provides for submission of manuscripts, peer review, document tracking, and semi-automatic correspondence with authors and reviewers. We present here in detail the editor's options, the author's options and the peer review process. Development of this system has provided for open access to our journal's content and has opened up great indexing opportunities with various indexes and databases, increasing the visibility of the authors' work that is published in BMIF. This proves once again the viability of the open access models and the huge shift in publishing of research from printed to online.

Key words: journal peer review system, online publishing, journal management, electronic publishing

Introduction

Nowadays, it seems that almost every aspect of our lives shifts from traditional to digital, we become more and more dependent of computer-based activities than ever before. With regard to the printed research in form of journal or conference papers, we are in the course of a major paradigm change from printed to digital in all stages of the research process, from the data collection to its analysis, visualization, interpretation etc., and to the final published paper. There is a strong believe that is revealed in various works in the literature that the journals that will impact the most the future of research, development and innovation will be online, transparent and with open access [5, 11, 13, 14, 15].

A long time study of The Association of Research Libraries [18], which has been started in 1991, had shown that, by 2007, 60% of the 20000 peer review journals taken into consideration were available online [8]. Software systems that allow electronic publishing support this significant shift in publishing. In the last decade a lot of new peer review software systems have been created and their support has become critical to the editors of conference proceedings and journals [2, 3, 4, 10, 12, 13]. These systems provide for uploading of the submitted papers, for

assignment of the papers to reviewers, for managing the interaction between the editorial team members and both authors and reviewers, for editing proceedings or journal issues and so on.

In this paper we present a journal peer review system, which we have developed to support our editorial work for the BMIF Journal [20]. The system provides for manuscript submission, peer review, document tracking, and semi-automatic correspondence with authors and reviewers. The main reason of undertaking such a responsibility resides in the need for a simple review system that provides for our customized needs and that can be easily adapted to any future changes that may occur in our publishing requirements. Another important reason for not adopting an existing system resides in the difficulty of managing and using such systems that have been generally built to provide support for multiple discrete publications. Moreover, the need for independence of one specific system has weighted a lot in our decision to develop our own peer review system.

The structure of this paper is as follows: the second section contains the related work and reveals several relevant works in the literature that present, analyze and compare the most important open source and commercial peer review software systems available. The third section presents thoroughly the BMIF's online peer review system, focusing on the editor's options, on the author's options and on the peer review process itself. The last section is dedicated to the conclusions and to some future work ideas.

Related Work

Despite the fact that, to the best of our knowledge, in the literature there is a shortage of papers on peer review software systems, a comprehensive search for conference and/or journal review software systems, has found a significant number of such systems. First, there is a pleiad of conference review systems: CRS [22], MySPIE [37], OpenConf [38], BYU [21], CyberChair [24], EasyChair[27], and Open Conference Systems [39]. All these systems are either open source or have a limited version that is free to use. Unfortunately, all these systems have been created to provide support for conference management, and they offer only limited support for journal management. The major publishing houses use proprietary software for their journals' management. Some notable exceptions exist, as it will be presented in this section.

A conference management system that is quite visible in the literature, compared with the others presented above, is ConfSys, which has been designed to help the conference chairs and the program committee *to manage the processes of academic conferences, and to provide conference related services for author and conference participants* [6, 7]. It allows uploading of papers, their assignment to reviewers, debating and rating papers, creating the conference program, registering for the conference, collecting slides for presentations etc. ConfSys uses a client-server architecture and it is role-based, having six possible roles: General Chair, Program Chair, Program Committee Members, Editor, Author and Conference Participant. It provides for *all the processes of a conference, and automates most of the administrative tasks* [7]. ConfSys has not been publicly released yet, though it has been used to support some real conferences.

A presentation of commercial web-based journal manuscript management and peer review software and systems available in 2002 can be found in [10]. Moreover, the author has included in his overview the list of journals that use each of the presented systems. In this work we find information on several such systems: AllenTrack [17], Bench>Press [19], Edikit [28], ESPERE [47], JournalAssistant [10], ManuscriptCentral [45], and Rapid Review [43]. Most of these systems (AllenTrack, Rapid Review, Bench>Press, Edikit, ESPERE, Manuscript Central, RapidReview) facilitate the whole online management process of scholar journals: manuscript submission, peer review, document tracking, and publishing. Besides this functionality, Edikit can be also used for conference management and for producing electronic versions of

previously printed journals. In addition, ESPERE provides also for re-activating the archived submissions. The Journal Assistant system is no longer available online. As described in [10], it was a database application that provided support only for manuscript submission (limited file formats to MS Word and WordPerfect), peer review, and document tracking. Manuscript Central, which has become ScholarOne Manuscripts in the meantime, provides for (1) *automatically executing task assignments, e-mail reminders, and web-based research tools*, (2) *capturing data and files in multiple languages and formats and create PDF and HTML proofs on the fly*, and (3) *customizing requirements at the journal level, including submissions questions, key words, files types, and field size limits* [45].

A more recent overview (2005) of some commercial online submission and peer review systems is presented in [12]. At that time, Manuscript Central and Editorial Manager [29] were market leaders in this field. Today, Editorial Manager has more than 3700 publications that use it, and ScholarOne is used by more than 3400 publications [46]. Besides these two systems, the author considers also Bench>Press, Edikit, EJournalPress [30], ESPERE, FontisWorks [33], OJS [40], RapidReview and XpressTrack [49]. The author mentions that all the commercially leading systems offered, at that time, a very similar set of features that supported the online management process. He considers that the choice between these systems must rely mainly on (1) ease of use (ranked as the most important by the publishers participating to the survey), (2) configurability and the ability to offer the closest match to the existing publishing workflow, (3) both vendor's long-term viability and its understanding of the peer review process, and (4) support for the editorial office work.

A very comprehensive study on open source electronic publishing systems had been performed between November 2006 and July 2007 and it is presented in [3]. The authors have initially considered seven systems: DPubS (Digital Publishing System) [26], GNU Eprints [31], Hyperjournal [34], Open Journal System [40], Connexions/Rhaptos [23], DiVA (Digitala Vetenskapliga Arkivet) [25], and Topaz [48]. Due to their limited support for general functionality that is expected from an electronic publishing system, the authors have discarded from their detailed analysis three of the systems: Connexions/Rhaptos, DiVA, and Topaz.

For the remaining systems, they have performed local installation and have read the supporting documentation, taking into consideration several aspects: institutional affiliation and viability of the project, technical requirements, maintenance, scalability, documented APIs, submission, peer review management, administrative functions, access, formats, and electronic commerce functions. Their results are briefly summarized further on. Thus, DPubS offers *a customizable, skinnable, repository-style application for storing and providing access to multiple, discrete publications*. Though, DPubS has been hard to install, and its documentation, at the moment of the study, was *inconsistent or incomplete* [3]. Eprints provided *an easy-to-use repository-style application with the main purpose of provision of scholarly materials in a free and open manner* and had a large community of adopters throughout the world (both users and developers). The main issue with Eprints was that it was not a full-scale electronic publishing system in the sense that it was not supporting the whole journal management process [3]. This is a fact even today, when Eprints is delivered as *the most powerful repository software* [31].

A very interesting approach has the Hyperjournal model, which stores both accepted and rejected articles in its repository, acknowledging the fact that *the notion of quality varies and changes; it is affected by time, space, and cultural factors* [1]. The authors of the above-mentioned study consider that Hyperjournal has a very appealing default user interface, and, by being built on top of its RDF backend, allows users to jump quickly to the relevant article. Moreover, the editorial workflow is completely customizable and administrative roles can be added easily. They consider that the main weakness of the system has been the challenge of its installation.

The last system approached in their study, Open Journal Systems (OJS), models the entire scholarly and scientific journal production and publication process: author-initiated account generation and article submissions, peer-review, editing, copy-editing, production, publication, and final archiving. The OJS initiative is a part of the Public Knowledge Project [13, 40, 41]. In opinion of the authors of the study, OJS is easy to install and has *the best, most comprehensive and clear documentation* of the systems under consideration. It provides support for multiple discrete publications, each publication being separately skinnable, it has both a large deployment (over 6600 installations worldwide [40]; 3000 real journal titles in January 2009 [4]) and active developer and user communities. Potential improvements for OJS, in opinion of the study's authors, would be the support for an outside authentication mechanism, integration with external RDF repositories, and use of an external repository for persistent storage.

A comparison of three important open source online publishing systems, namely DPubS, ePubTk and OJS, can be found in [2]. The author describes his quest to find the most appropriate system to publish the Ikaros e-journal [35]. The author said that, at the moment of the study, DPubS had a *nice architecture*, but missed the peer review capability [2]. Moreover, the documentation was scarce and the installation difficult. The latest news about the system is from 2007, when the newest version of the system, DPubS 2.1 was launched. This version includes the needed support for various editorial services: submission of content, reviewer assignment, delivery of content to reviewers, peer review, review submission, editorial review, journal issue assembly, and issue publication [26].

ePublishing Toolkit (ePubTk) is *a software package providing tools to help in publishing scientific content on the web* [32]. It can be used to create, maintain and run a family of online journals. At the time the comparison was performed, the author thought that the installation was not *a trivial task*, especially because ePubTk has been developed to work primarily on Linux. Now things seem to be better for Windows users by using a special client (RapidSVN, a cross-platform GUI front-end for the Subversion revision system [44]). What made this software special, in author's opinion, it was the fact that it has been designed for a special type of publications, the so-called *living reviews*, which are invited papers that can be modified even after their publication [2]. *Their unique concept allows authors to regularly update their articles to incorporate the latest developments in the field* [36]. Therefore, the publishing workflow needs to be adapted accordingly: the authors do not submit the papers in the first place, but the editorial board establishes what the topics for future issues will be, and then invites authors to submit papers on those topics. The accepting authors are assigned reviewers and, from this point on, the workflow is similar to the traditional one.

Finally, the third system included in the comparison, OJS was considered to be more monolithic and more robust than the other two systems, and its installation was the easiest of them all. In 2006, the system had a complete rewrite, which included many of its users requirements, and the study's author has seen that as a prove that OJS developers carefully listen to its users and improve the system accordingly. The major fault he has discovered was the absence of a powerful search. The current version, OJS 2.3.1-2, improves significantly this capability: the search form, by default, performs searching within the particular browsed journal; though, *it is possible to search across all the journals in a particular installation. Likewise, browsing by title and by author can span journals* [42]. Positive reviews gets OJS also from its users who consider their experience with the system as being *indicative of great potential* and as providing for *new models of scholarly communication* [9]. The excellent documentation and the support of the very large OJS user community are seen as very important advantages as well [2, 13].

The BMIF's Online Peer Review System

Editor's Options

The online peer review system is available from the Submission page of the BMIF's journal, by logging into the system as an accepted user with a valid password [20]. After successful login, an editor has several options to choose from: viewing the current situation of all the submitted papers, editing the information about the members of both board and review committees, editing past issues, accessing a pool of useful uploaded files, and performing an editorial review. A sample screenshot that shows the current state for the papers submitted for the first issue of 2010 can be seen in Figure 1.

For each paper, various information are available: the paper ID, date of the submission, the source and the pdf files of the paper first submitted, along with the source file, the pdf file and the copyright transfer statement of the most recent submission, the IP from which the submission has been made, the title of the paper, the authors and their e-mails, the state of the paper (accepted as it is, accepted with minor revisions, accepted with major revisions and re-review, not within journal's scope, not within reviewer's expertise or not accepted) and several information about the reviewing process itself. Thus, one can find here information about each review assigned to a particular reviewer: the state (assigned, saved, finished, or declined), the assignation date, the expiration date, the score of the paper, and the reviewer's recommendation (similar to the paper's state presented above). Most of the text fields and command buttons from this page have *tooltips* or *infotips*, with supplemental description or further information.

The screenshot shows the 'Administration' section of the BMIF's Online Peer Review System. The main content area displays a 'List of submitted papers... found 29 papers' with a summary: 9=unknown, 9=accepted with major revisions, 7=accepted with minor revisions, 4=not accepted. The list includes three papers:

- Paper 147:** #162156147, submitted 2010-06-20 10:08:40. Title: IT as a Supporting Technology in Emerging Countries. Author: Mr. Gomez Sanchez (gomes@info.catal.mx). Status: unknown.
- Paper 146:** #092221146, submitted 2010-06-20 10:02:01. Title: Overview of Scientific Visualization Algorithms. Authors: Mr. Mark Smith (mark@gmail.com) and Mr. John Dorwinsky (dorwj@cs.undro.edu). Status: accepted with major revisions. A 'copyright transfer' button is visible.
- Paper 145:** #675014145, submitted 2010-06-20 09:34:26. Title: A New Approach for Medical Information Analysis. Author: Ms. George McCornell (georgemc@uni-bonn.de). Status: unknown.

Each paper entry includes a table of reviews with columns for Review, Status, Actions, User, Date assign, Date expire, Score, and Recommend. For Paper 146, reviews are shown from users 'gaber' and 'pit'.

Fig. 1. Editor's option: the list of submitted papers

Thus, an editor may perform a variety of operations: assigning a new review to a certain reviewer, generating an author's review page, thanking to each reviewer who has already finished one review, viewing the content of the review (including the comments for editors that authors may not see), reminding to a reviewer that the deadline for his or her review is

approaching or overdue, and creating a pdf file that contains the review form (for reviewers who have difficulties in using computerized systems; they can do their reviews on the printed review form, and these are uploaded to the system at a later time by an editor).

Author's Options

The authors can use a web submission form to upload metadata about their paper, along with the paper itself. The paper's metadata consists of title, abstract, keywords, topics (both introduced by authors and selected from a topics' tree, based on the ACM Computer Classification System [10]), and information about the authors. The author who performs the online submission is supposed to introduce descriptive information about all the paper's authors with regard to their title, name and surname, two e-mail addresses, phone and fax numbers. Information about each author's institution should be provided as well: name, URL, post address, city and country. The submission is accepted provided that the author supplies all the mandatory information, which is marked with a star in the web form that can be seen in Figure 2.

Fig. 2. Web submission form

After the first round of the reviewing process is completed, the authors are provided with the link to the author's review page where they can find the reviews of their paper and its current state. An editor generates this link, which is then included in an e-mail sent to the authors. From author's review page, an author may upload the most recent version of his or her paper (source, pdf and copyright statement), and may access the reviews of the paper (Figure 3).

Paper ID: 675014145 Paper status:		
Camera ready paper	final paper (pdf)	<input type="text"/> <input type="button" value="Browse..."/> <input type="button" value="Upload"/> file not found
	source file (LaTeX, Doc)	<input type="text"/> <input type="button" value="Browse..."/> <input type="button" value="Upload"/> file not found
	signed copyright form	<input type="text"/> <input type="button" value="Browse..."/> <input type="button" value="Upload"/> file not found
	* please download sum and upload the copyright transfer form available here	
Author(s):	George McCornell	
Paper Title:	A New Approach for Medical Information Analysis	
Abstract:	This paper presents a new approach for analyzing different information...	
Keywords:	data mining, information analysis	
Reviewer 1		
Recommend:	accept with minor revisions	
Paper type:	applied research	Relevance: 3 good
Reviewer familiarity:	high	Originality: 4 excellent
English language:	good, minor improvements needed	Technical: 3 good
Value of paper:	new perspective, issue or problem definition	Clarity: 3 good
Structure of paper:	very well structured, clear	References: 2 fair
References section:	appropriate, but not enough	Overall: 3 good
Comments to the author(s):	The paper makes a comprehensive overview of several issues related to medical information analysis: the development and implementation of algorithms and strategies based on the use of various models (geometrical, statistical, physical, functional, etc.) to solve the following types of problems, using biomedical image data sets: representation of pictorial data, visualization, feature extraction, segmentation, inter-study and inter-subject registration, longitudinal / temporal studies, image-guided surgery and intervention, texture, shape and motion measurements, spectral analysis, digital anatomical atlases, statistical shape analysis, computational anatomy, computational physiology, virtual and augmented reality for therapy planning and guidance, telemedicine with medical images, telepresence in medicine, telesurgery and image-guided medical robots.	Total: 18 (of 24)
Reviewer 2		
Reviewer 3		

Fig. 3. Author's review page

From this page, s/he can obtain detailed information that contains each reviewer's point of view with respect to the paper's content: the recommendation with respect to publishing, the type of the paper, the reviewer's familiarity with the paper's subject, the level of the English language, the paper's value and structure, the quality of the references, and the score of the paper. This score is calculated by summing up the score given by the reviewer for each of the following categories: relevance, originality, technical quality, clarity, references, and overall impression. The authors may also find here the particular comments and recommendations of the editor with regard to their paper (Figure 5b).

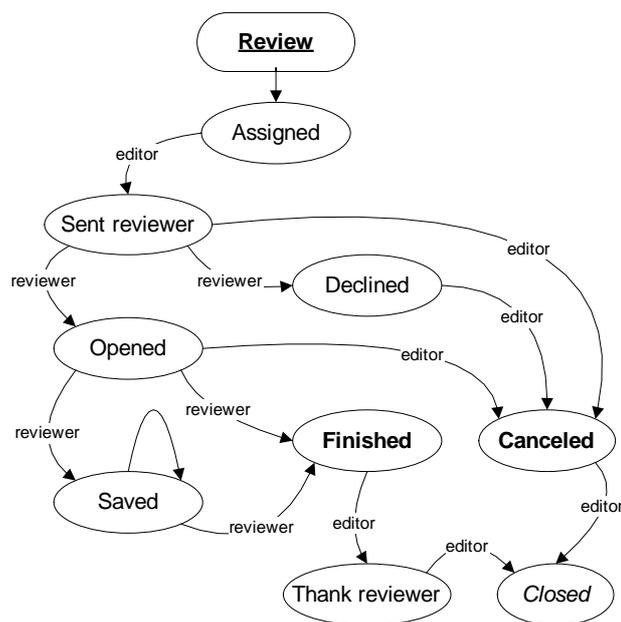
The Peer Review Process

The reviewing part of the editorial process consists of the following steps: one editor assigns a review on a particular paper to a certain reviewer, and the systems sends an e-mail to the reviewer to let him or her know about that. The reviewer may either accept to make the review or decline it, based either on the paper's abstract or the full paper, or on both of them (Figure 4).

Paper ID: 145 Status: assigned by editor	
Reviewer: Zoran Constantinescu	
Paper Title:	A New Approach for Medical Information Analysis
Download:	b7be1e7f9a291cc3.pdf
Abstract:	This paper presents a new approach for analyzing different information...
Keywords:	data mining, information analysis
<input type="button" value="Make review"/>	<input type="button" value="Decline review"/>
Click if you would like to make a review for this paper.	Click if you could not make a review for this paper.

Fig. 4. Review form before accepting or declining a review

If, for any reason, the reviewer, after accepting to review one paper, wants to give up on this duty, he or she may still do that, by selecting the paper's state *not within reviewer's expertise*. On the other hand, if the reviewing task is accepted, the reviewer is supposed to fill up the paper review form that is shown in Figure 5b. During the reviewing process, a reviewer may *save* the current content of the review as many times as s/he needs. When a reviewer finishes a certain review, he or she must *save and finish* that review. That way, the editor acknowledges that a particular review is finished, both from the submitted papers' page (Figure 1) and by the e-mail sent by the system to the BMIF's address. The system provides the editor with the possibility to send a "thank you" message to the reviewer. At any moment, the editor may cancel a review assignment due to several real world circumstances. The state diagram for this process can be seen in Figure 5a.



Paper ID: 145 Status: saved by reviewer
Reviewer: Zoran Constantinescu

Paper Title: A New Approach for Medical Information Analysis
Download: b10e1e779a291ca1.pdf
Abstract: This paper presents a new approach for analyzing different information.
Keywords: Data mining, information analysis.

Recommended:
Paper type:
Reviewer familiarity:
English language:
Value of paper:
Structure of paper:
References section:

Relevance: 1 poor 2 fair 3 good 4 excellent
Originality: 1 poor 2 fair 3 good 4 excellent
Technical: 1 poor 2 fair 3 good 4 excellent
Clarity: 1 poor 2 fair 3 good 4 excellent
References: 1 poor 2 fair 3 good 4 excellent
Overall: 1 poor 2 fair 3 good 4 excellent

Comments to the author(s): The paper makes a comprehensive overview of several issues related to medical information analysis: the development and implementation of algorithms and strategies based on the use of various models (geometrical, statistical, physical, functional, etc.) to solve the following types of problems, using biomedical image data sets: representation of pictorial data, visualization, feature extraction, segmentation, linear-probity and linear-subject registration, longitudinal / temporal studies, image-guided surgery and intervention, texture, shape and motion measurements, spectral analysis, digital anatomical atlases, statistical shape analysis, computational anatomy, computational physiology, virtual and augmented reality for therapy planning and guidance, telemedicine with medical images, telepresence in medicine, teletherapy and image-guided medical robots.

Comments to the editor: the paper may be published as it is, being a valuable contribution to this field.

Fig. 5. a) State diagram for the peer review process, b) Web reviewing form

Each paper that is submitted to the BMIF journal is double blind peer reviewed by at least 3 reviewers. During the first round of reviewing, two reviewers selected by an editor review one particular paper. After completion of this round, there are three possibilities: (1) the paper has been accepted for publishing by both reviewers, or (2) the paper has been rejected by both reviewers, or (3) the paper has been accepted by one reviewer and rejected by the other. In the first two cases, the editor uses the system capability to generate the author's review page and announces (via e-mail) the authors that the reviews on their paper, along with the paper's state, can be found in that page. In the third case, the editor assigns another reviewer to evaluate the paper, and, after the completion of this third review, let the authors know, which is the situation of their paper (two positive reviews mean acceptance).

The second round of reviewing starts after the authors upload the revised version of their papers, which takes into consideration the recommendations of the reviewers. During this round, an editor makes, for each and every paper, a third review assignment to another reviewer than the first two ones. This reviewer has access to both versions of the paper (initial, last) and to the two

reviews from the first round. S/he can also make her or his own recommendations to improve the paper. After the completion of this round, an editor sends a new message to the authors to let them know which the new state of their paper is. The second round of reviewing is repeated until the authors fulfill all the reviewing recommendations. The state diagram for this process is depicted in Figure 6. Each action performed by both authors and editors is documented by an e-mail sent by the system to the official BMIF's e-mail address. This way the editors have the opportunity to have access to the history of the editorial process.

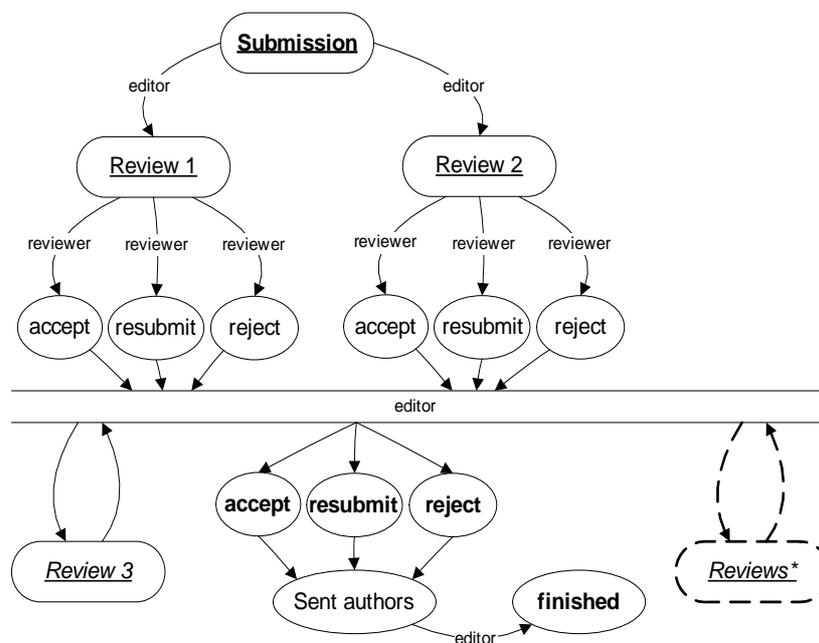


Fig. 6. a) State diagram for the paper's evaluation process

Conclusions and Future Work

This paper introduces our journal peer review system that we have developed to help us in our editorial work for the BMIF Journal. For the time being, our system allows manuscript submission, peer review, document tracking, and semi-automatic correspondence with both authors and reviewers. Therefore, the current version of the system is not yet a complete journal publishing software, as it does not support the final stages of the editorial workflow: production and publication. Therefore, our first future work ideas will go in that direction.

During our research of the related work, we have also learned interesting features that peer review and publishing systems provide and we will take them into consideration for including in future versions of our system: automatic adjustment of reviewer quota, rebuttal phase, online discussion of papers, increased security mechanism, plagiarism checking etc. Based on our current editorial experience, we think that a pre-review phase is also necessary to check that the paper complies with the guidelines for authors and whether the English language level is appropriate for publishing in a scientific journal or not. A plagiarism detection step would also be beneficial for the pre-review phase, because this is a very hot issue nowadays. Another improvement of the system that we take into account is the presentation of the editorial process history in a more structured form, to facilitate the access to it and to help the editors to find easier one specific fact.

This is one major advantage of developing a customized system that responds to our editorial needs, the fact that we can easily adapt it to any change in requirements. Another advantage the

system brings is related to the duration of the editorial phases it supports, this being significantly reduced. Before having this system, the whole submission and peer review processes were performed by e-mail correspondence between authors and editors on the one hand, and between editors and reviewers on the other hand. Development of this system has also provided for open access to the content of our journal, which has opened up powerful indexing opportunities with various indexes and databases, increasing the visibility of the work reported in our journal by the authors. This proves once more the viability of the open access models and the huge shift from printed to online with regard to the publishing of research.

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Sistemul de peer review online al jurnalului BMIF

Rezumat

Sîntem martorii unei schimbări de paradigmă de la forma tipărită la cea electronică în toate stadiile procesului de cercetare, iar acesta este standardul de facto pentru publicarea cercetării sub formă de articole în jurnale sau în volumele unor conferințe. În ultima decadă, au apărut foarte multe sisteme software pentru peer review, iar sprijinul lor pentru această schimbare majoră este de neîncoluit pentru editorii de jurnale sau volume ale conferințelor. Aceste sisteme permit încărcarea articolelor depuse, asignarea de articole către recenzori, managementul interacțiunii dintre editori și autori sau recenzori, editarea volumelor cu lucrări sau a aparițiilor unui jurnal etc. În acest articol prezentăm un sistem de peer review pentru jurnale, pe care l-am dezvoltat pentru a ne sprijini în activitatea noastră editorială de la revista BMIF. Sistemul permite depunerea manuscriselor, peer review, urmărirea documentelor și corespondența semi-automată cu autorii și recenzorii. Prezentăm aici opțiunile editorilor și ale autorilor, precum și procesul de peer review. Dezvoltarea acestui sistem a creat premisele accesului deschis la conținutul revistei noastre și, ca urmare a acestui fapt, a deschis importante oportunități de indexare în diverși indecși și baze de date, crescînd astfel vizibilitatea muncii autorilor care publică în BMIF. Aceasta demonstrează o dată în plus viabilitatea modelelor de acces deschis și schimbarea majoră în publicarea cercetării de la forma tipărită la cea online.