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My 3 Cents' Worth

If the initial feedback received from readers of the first few issues of *Science Online* is any indication, providing full text of all research articles and reports has opened an appealing additional avenue of information distribution, especially for readers for whom traditional postal delivery has been problematic. However, as we invited them to do, several readers expressed less than full satisfaction. It is important to address their concerns, many of which are already answered in the frequently asked questions (FAQ) document that can be accessed through the navigation bars of *Science Online* (<http://www.sciencemag.org>). Among the most frequent concerns: (i) a better and more powerful search engine is coming to *Science Online*; (ii) portable document files (PDFs) will be made available for those who wish to print an exact replica of the printed issue's page (sorry, WindowsNT users); (iii) the software to provide *Science Online* to institutional subscribers is under development; and (iv) during 1997, it will not be possible to subscribe to *Science Online* without a student or individual membership in the AAAS, the international scientific society that publishes *Science* and *Science Online*.

The fact that a subscription to *Science Online* will require a subscription to *Science*, together with our stated pricing for the online publication in 1997 at an additional \$12 per year (about 3 cents per day), clearly warrants some explanation of the reasoning that went into these decisions. First, as most readers will know, the AAAS is a not-for-profit scientific society, and its costs for staffing, producing, printing, and distributing the weekly printed magazine for its members must be covered by some combination of membership dues and revenue from advertising. The balanced budget seeks no egregious profit but is quite intolerant to deficits. Simply stated, new ventures require new funds. Second, as often stated here, *Science Online* provides an electronic complement that is much more than a searchable, paperless, rapidly distributed version of what we print. In fact, what *Science's* editors envision as the eventual package of online features may change considerably the way scientists communicate the results of their experiments or contemplate their future course in the light of events in the worlds of science policy, science funding, and the businesses of science.

For example, several additional online features begin with this issue of *Science* and *Science Online*. Our revised home page has multilingual information for contributors. We also inaugurate daily briefings of breaking science news (a service called *ScienceNOW*) and have made major upgrades to our electronic-only communication services for young scientists in training (*Science's* Next Wave). Moreover, *Science Online* provides gateways between the citations and methods in our published papers and broader databases of information. The Enhanced Perspectives first made available in pilot form nearly a year ago will now be a regular feature in *Science Online*. To develop these linkages and target high-quality pertinent databases to examine are costly and time-consuming activities that go beyond the demands of the printed issue. The "Beyond the Printed Page" section of *Science Online* will provide enhancements for scholars by offering datasets, movies, audio, and other special materials, which again are expensive but we hope will be useful to our readership.

The editors of *Science* in all of its in-print and online formats view these electronic complements as potentially empowering. Our intent is not to engage in premature commercialism but to protect and enhance the value of a subscription to the printed journal. We aim to provide our readers with a timely service that is easily usable, driven by the contents we labor so hard to filter and validate. We believe that it is possible to fully utilize the rapid new media without the least compromise of our commitment to rigor, truth, and accuracy. Lastly, let us emphasize: Even those who opt not to subscribe to *Science Online* will still be able to access almost all the information we were providing before full-length online content became available on 20 September, simply by completing a brief registration form. Those who wish to retain complete anonymity will nevertheless still be able to see a smaller subset of these features.

These are times of transition in the newly converging fields of computers, communications, and content distribution. *Science* seeks to bring these technologies into the daily lives of our readers in meaningful and useful ways. As Mark Twain said, "It's no use to throw a good thing away merely because the market isn't ripe yet." Your feedback will continue to be appreciated.

Floyd E. Bloom