Journal of Mechanical Design

Editorial

An Invitation to a Broader Discourse

We write JMD papers to communicate our ideas and findings to our peer researchers and practitioners. But how do we discuss these ideas and findings among ourselves? How do we create a conversation or a discourse?

Conversation allows us to put forth different viewpoints and to learn from each other, and it requires some sort of balance of contribution among participants. How do we achieve that at JMD?

In a well-written research paper, the introduction and background sections build a thread of conversation, as they pose the presented work in the context of previous ones, identify gaps and build arguments. This thread is picked up by the reviewers, and in the ensuing review process an exchange takes place where both reviewers and authors learn from each other. Over (rather long) time, published papers from a variety of authors on a particular topic evolve into an archived conversation. Moreover, many JMD papers arrive after having been presented and discussed at ASME conferences, which offer many opportunities for face-to-face discussions, arguments and immediate feedback. Presumably, the authors use all that advantageously for the "journal version" of the work.

This process works. But it is not always ideal. The conversation during the review is not quite balanced; authors write background sections in perfunctory manner to "cover the bases" and not to antagonize potential reviewers; and, it can take almost a lifetime. Some ideas are certainly worth a lifetime of study and conversation, but can't we find a middle way between that and the blogs?

ASME journal policy indeed offers such a path. If you read carefully the author resources guidelines (http://journaltool.asme.org/Help/AuthorHelp/WebHelp/JournalsHelp.htm#Guidelines/Getting_Started.htm), you will find that there are many possible journal submission types available:

Technical submissions, which undergo rigorous peer review, include:

- Full-length research papers
- Technical briefs
- Design innovation papers

Non-technical submissions, which undergo editorial review, may include:

- Book reviews
- Technology reviews
- Discussions
- Closures
- Announcements
- Editorials

We had occasion to write about technical briefs (http://asmejmd.org/show_editorial.php?id=35) and design innovation papers (http://asmejmd.org/show_editorial.php?id=27), which undergo peer review. However, the "non-technical submissions," which undergo only editorial review, offer excellent avenues for conversation. For example, in the ASME guidelines we find:

Discussions and Closures
A discussion is a short article that critically addresses specific results or data provided in a published research paper. Publication of a submitted discussion is at the discretion of the Editor. Discussions should not exceed 500 words. A closure is the response of an author whose paper was the subject of a published discussion. Publication of a submitted closure is at the discretion of the Editor. Recommended length for closures is 250 words (per discussion).

Book and Software Reviews
A book review is a brief, critical and unbiased evaluation of a current book determined to be of interest to the journal audience. A technology review is a brief, critical and unbiased evaluation of a current technology, application, or product determined to be of interest to the journal audience. Publication of a submitted book or technology review is at the discretion of the Editor. The suggested length for this type of submittal is 1 to 4 pages

I would like to invite the JMD community to contribute more, and more frequently, such submissions. I would be willing to extend the length of discussions and closures beyond the limits stated above, if warranted. Longer contributions that promote discussion could be treated as technical briefs, and we could name them design briefs, for example, using Design Brief: ...) as the starting part of the title. There is also the "Other" contribution category "for material that falls outside the definitions stated above." There is plenty of discretion for me there. As authors, you just need to identify the type of contribution for your submission in the online system and then I can process it accordingly. You can also send me a direct email to discuss the intent of your contribution.

Apart from, let us say, "political" blocks, there are some cultural blocks that make such submissions rare. When I travel in Europe, I am frequently reminded that a spirited, open argument is a natural and welcome form of discourse there, but it would be considered confrontational, hence inappropriate, in American or Asian cultures. There are of course obvious rules of engagement that we must observe in such a discourse, just as in conversations among friends. For example, we discuss the ideas not the people who present the ideas.

Blockbusting is a time-honored way to enhance creativity, so I would like to invite more contributions that will help us all be more creative and learn from each other through some JMD conversations.

Panos Y. Papalambros
Editor