What’s black and white and dead all over?

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Sometimes you stumble upon a gem. “Black and White and Dead All Over” is such a gem. It is an 84 minute documentary from 2013 by Chris Foster about the problems of the American newspaper industry as it struggles to remain financially sustainable. Since 2007 more than 250 American newspapers have stopped printing. And not just the lesser ones. The Washington Post – of Watergate fame – only survived by being sold to Jeff Bezos, the Amazon.com owner, after seven successive years of falling profits. The documentary reveals “an industry in the midst of a financial death spiral, as readers abandon print for online news sources”.

*Human Reproduction* is no newspaper, we publish science. Does this mean we do not have to worry? I’m afraid not. Many of our readers are abandoning print for online publishing. Since three months now this journal has been delivered to your doorstep with a beautiful, newly designed cover. Did you notice? I somehow doubt it. Our average reader, when wishing to know something about, for example, infertility, does not reach for the journal. They go to PubMed or Google Scholar instead and instantly find what they need, irrespective of where it was published. But they hopefully recognize that if it comes from *Human Reproduction* it means quality. The published article has been peer reviewed and approved by at least five experts, the text has been edited, and it is presented in a lay-out and a format that makes it easy to grab its message.

But a lot happens between acceptance of a manuscript for publication and its reaching your doorstep. Our text editors work on it, the typesetters prepare it for printing, it is put into the HR lay-out, it is collected together with other articles into an issue, it is then sent halfway around the world for printing on enormous rolls of (expensive) paper in a huge plant full of robots, it is shipped back, divided into batches, wrapped individually, labelled, stamped, shipped again, and distributed by mail. So, when finally it arrives on your desk it may already be several months old. Is this a sustainable publishing model? Is this rapid communication of science? Obviously not, and for this reason, several years ago, the online publication became the definitive ‘article of record’. At the moment, the time from arrival to first decision is 30 days; from acceptance to publication online it takes another 30 days. So why wait for several more months to receive the paper edition? I have mentioned before how positive I am about the online edition, I read the journal exclusively on my iPad. And that’s evidently the future, rapid reviewing, rapid production, no fossil fuels burnt, no precious trees cut down.

And the next challenge is around the corner already: Open Access (OA) publishing. Together with our (not-for-profit) publisher, Oxford University Press, we are driven to facilitate the widest possible dissemination of high-quality reproductive research. At the moment, according to the hybrid *Oxford Open* model, all papers in *Human Reproduction* are freely accessible after 12 months and immediate OA is available for a fee (Gold OA). For the foreseeable future, we expect the subscription model, with provision for Green OA after specified (6 months? 12 months?) periods, to be the way science publishing will go. Nevertheless, the uptake of paid OA has not been great so far. Less than 5% of authors opt for it. So, we need to develop new ways of disseminating science. The introduction of longer, more informative ‘Extended Abstracts’ has been a first step in this direction. We have worked with the new format for over a year now and they are well received. They offer enough details to judge the originality, quality and importance of a study from its abstract (in PubMed, in Google Scholar). This will help the reader in deciding whether or not to download and read the entire paper.

So, *Human Reproduction* is not in “the midst of a financial death spiral”, we are brimming with energy and eager for the future (which, I can give away now, will be online-only, and open access).

Until then, enjoy our new cover.