About the Author

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Mission

BioOne sees sustainable scholarly publishing as an inherently collaborative enterprise connecting authors, nonprofit publishers, academic institutions, research libraries, and research funders in the common goal of maximizing access to critical research.

BioOne explores economic models and strategic partnerships that balance the needs of all stakeholders, and currently demonstrates this balance by offering financially sustainable information services in the biological sciences. BioOne supports best practices that increase operational effectiveness and technological standards that integrate its content with a global network of scholarly exchange.
Introduction

This is the story of BioOne’s first ten years (1999 to 2009), a narrative of the organization’s initial—and ongoing—adaptations to meet the dramatic technological and economic transformations of the scholarly publishing environment at the turn of the 21st century. Lessons for the future derive as much from BioOne’s accomplishments as from the challenges encountered along the way. A decade after its inception, BioOne remains indebted to the contributions and insight of its forebears. This story belongs to them.
A Lot Can Happen in a Decade

Over the past ten years, BioOne has evolved from the kernel of an idea scribbled on a napkin into an eight-million-dollar per year organization serving a community of over 100 nonprofit publishers, 4,000 libraries, and millions of researchers, educators, and students around the globe. While this would be an enviable trajectory for any commercial startup, BioOne has forged this path as a mission-driven 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

Serving a community with often divergent interests has been both a unique challenge and a strength for BioOne, which was created to balance the needs of all stakeholders for a more collaborative, functional, and sustainable scholarly communications sector. Truly at the nexus of academia, BioOne unites publishers, libraries, students, and researchers in the common goal of providing cost-effective access to high-quality scientific research. In addition, BioOne’s mission has expanded to include critical education and information services for its community members, seeking to contribute to the global network of scholarly exchange.

At the beginning, however, BioOne was a hopeful answer to the scholarly community’s concern that electronic publishing in the sciences was being ceded to commercial interests, and that without a sustainable, nonprofit alternative, small to mid-sized society publishers wishing to remain independent would be excluded from the online publishing arena. BioOne’s founders—The American Institute of Biological Sciences, Big 12 Plus Libraries Consortium (renamed the Greater Western Library Alliance in 2001), the University of Kansas, Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition, and Allen Press, Inc.—were then, and continue to be, committed to the ideal that scholarly publishing be a sustainable enterprise mindful of the needs of all stakeholders. BioOne is the product of the collaboration of these five founding organizations, as well as the countless individuals who have served as its innovators, champions, and stewards along the way.
A Call to Action

In 1999, a year after the founding of Google and two years before the formation of Wikipedia, academia was flush with the possibilities of leveraging the Internet to further scholarly communication. A few large scientific societies had already begun to experiment with an online presence for their associated journals. Still, numerous barriers—technological, financial, and practical—prevented a wide-scale shift to electronic publishing for small to mid-sized societies. Chief among these concerns was the funding of online publishing, especially for those societies operating on a cost-recovery basis and without capital development funds. How could online publishing be sustainable over the long-term for scientific societies, without forcing libraries to pay exorbitant subscription costs?

For some time, a number of key thinkers involved in scientific publishing had been mulling over opportunities and challenges inherent in this new electronic world. In an influential and often quoted article published in 1998, “Reforming Scholarly Publishing in the Sciences: A Librarian Perspective,” Joseph Branim of SUNY-Stony Brook, and Mary Case, of the Association of Research Libraries, summarized the economic problems inherent in modern scholarly publishing and the escalating tensions between content producers and content purchasers. At the same time, David Shulenburger, provost of the University of Kansas, wrote a proposal to his Big 12 university counterparts entitled “Scholarly Communication and the Need for Collective Action.” The proposal, which was unanimously endorsed by his provosts, urged a call to action in support of alternative, nonprofit publication models that promoted sustainable scholarly communication. It urged scientific societies to remain independent and in control of their publication programs, using low cost, alternative publication venues rather than ceding control to more expensive commercial publishing options.

Given the few options that existed, this was a loaded challenge indeed. At that time, only two major nonprofit collaborative endeavors existed for the electronic publication of current content—Project Muse (Johns Hopkins University) and HighWire Press (Stanford University). Both projects were early in their development, having launched in 1995. Scientific societies in particular were faced with few options as they struggled to keep pace financially and technologically; many resorted to restrictive, long-term deals with large commercial scientific, technical, and medical (STM) publishers that had histories of increasing subscription prices well beyond the means of the library market. The necessity of a nonprofit alternative that respects the independence of scientific societies and the limited capacity of library budgets was clear. Still, the questions remained: who would answer this call for change, and how could such an endeavor be financially sustainable?
Bio X

In early 1999, four individuals met for lunch in the basement of Teller’s, a local establishment in Lawrence, Kansas, to discuss an idea for a publishing collaborative for nonprofit scientific journals. Present for what would thereafter be referred to as BioOne’s “conception” were Guy Dresser and Ted Freeman, both of Allen Press, Inc., Adrian Alexander, executive director of the Big 12 Plus Libraries Consortium (renamed the Greater Western Library Alliance in 2001), and William Crowe, the University of Kansas CIO and Dean of Libraries.

The initial idea, which would be more fully developed in the months to come, proposed BioOne (then, “Bio X”) as a database of nonprofit scientific journals aggregated based on content cohort rather than publisher brand. The database would provide users with a one-stop shop of full-text current scientific content, appearing in fully encoded and linked SGML—the leading-edge markup language at that time. Supporting, developing, and directing this project would be a collaborative endeavor, with stakeholders from both sides of the scholarly publishing enterprise—libraries and publishers.

Although a commercial company, Allen Press’s business had always been closely tied to the nonprofit sector. By 1999, Allen Press counted numerous scientific societies as their print publishing clients, including 46 journals affiliated with the American Institute of Biological Sciences. Allen Press leadership thus appreciated that the company’s future success was closely intertwined with the success—and sustainability—of its nonprofit clientele, and was determined to support its society partners in their transitions to online publishing. To the BioOne working group, Allen Press would bring substantial technological expertise, having offered SGML conversion and online publishing through their proprietary platform since 1996. Plus, with their operation based in Lawrence, their proximity to fellow founder the University of Kansas would prove beneficial. In addition to its role as a BioOne founding partner, Allen Press would serve as chief technological provider for the project, contributing content conversion, loading, and quality control, as well as customer service for, and ongoing development of, the online database.

Complementing this publisher perspective were librarians Alexander, from the Big 12 Plus Libraries Consortium (BTP) and Crowe, from the University of Kansas (KU). Both brought with them the budgetary and access concerns of the research library community and the desire to be part of the solution for which their colleague David Shulenburger had so eloquently advocated. Both organizations had much to offer the budding project. BTP could leverage its membership of 23 large research libraries in the Mid- and Southwest, both for charter support and early subscriptions to the nascent aggregation. KU, in addition to early financial support, could also provide critical high-speed Internet access, as well as connection with the university’s backup system to support the online infrastructure.
BioOne is Born

By April of 1999, a concept paper on BioOne, penned by Robert Kidd of Allen Press, Richard O’Grady of AIBS, and Guy Dresser of Allen Press, was being distributed to key organizations and community leaders to excite interest in the budding project. Chief among its recipients were two of BioOne’s future founding partners: the American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS) and the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC).

At that time, AIBS served about 125,000 researchers and students worldwide via 69 member societies in the ecological, biological, and environmental sciences. BioOne’s early organizers knew that any large-scale scientific publishing endeavor would need the support and endorsement of AIBS to succeed. Fortunately, Executive Director Richard O’Grady and the AIBS Board of Directors were fully supportive of the project. AIBS agreed to provide early financial support and, most critically, to promote BioOne to its society members.

AIBS’s interest in the project was threefold. First, many of AIBS’s member societies did not yet have an electronic version of their journals, and were beginning to search for a viable option that would allow them to achieve cost efficiencies while expanding their total circulation. Those AIBS-affiliated societies that had already sought commercial solutions had seen dramatic increases in their subscription rates, and in some cases, the loss of editorial or copyright control. AIBS felt compelled to assist its community by providing an alternative to this commercial path. Second, AIBS saw the need to better serve the researchers, educators, and students in the discipline with a single access point for leading research in the biological sciences. Finally, as a nonprofit collaborative endeavor itself, AIBS’s mission was well aligned with the goal of uniting scientific societies and libraries in a common enterprise focused on sustainability.

SPARC was a fledgling organization itself when it joined BioOne’s founding consortium, having been created by the Association of Research Libraries the year prior, in 1998. SPARC’s mission included helping develop low-cost, high-quality alternatives to commercial scholarly publishing, and as such, the BioOne project was an ideal fit. With Director Rick Johnson’s endorsement of the initiative came the critical support of SPARC’s community of member libraries, of which ARL member libraries were an important part. BioOne is indebted to these libraries for their contribution of essential capital funding for the project, without which BioOne would never have been viable. In addition, these libraries became some of BioOne’s charter subscribers, and their leadership BioOne’s chief advocates.

Together—Allen Press, AIBS, the Big 12 Plus Libraries Consortium, the University of Kansas, and SPARC—signed a memorandum of understanding in June 1999, solidifying their partnership and commitment to develop BioOne. With the community abuzz with news of the collaborative endeavor and the first press release of the project released in July, what began as a few notes jotted on a napkin was quickly becoming a reality. In the summer of 1999, BioOne was big news, with discussion of the project in such publications as Science, Nature, and The Chronicle of Higher Education.

On August 23, 1999, BioOne was incorporated in the District of Columbia as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation with five initial members on the Board of Directors, one from each of the founding organizations: Rand Allen, of Allen Press, Inc.; Adrian Alexander, of BTP; David Shulenburger, of KU; Rick Johnson, of SPARC; and Richard O’Grady, of AIBS. An expanded Board of ten members, two from each founding organization, met in January 2000, electing Alan Covich, then president of AIBS and a well respected biologist at Colorado State University, as the Board’s first chair.
Mobilizing the Library Community

BioOne’s largest and most immediate challenge was a newly formed organization was to create a business model that did not overly burden the library community. Whereas seed money would certainly be necessary, the founding organizations were opposed to any model that necessitated grant funding beyond the early development years. Instead, the goal was to make the organization self-sustaining within a five-year period. The initial pre-launch costs were sizeable, with development of the initial BioOne database estimated at well over $1,000,000. To meet this capitalization requirement, BioOne’s leadership proposed an ambitious funding model through future subscribing library support. SPARC and the Big 12 Plus Libraries Consortium led the charge, mobilizing their member libraries for support.

BioOne’s first call for funding requested library support ranging from $1,000 to $5,000, proportionate to a library’s acquisitions budget. This support was not structured as a grant, but as an investment to be repaid over a five- or six-year period through a reduction in subscription fees. Libraries pledging funds—henceforth referred to as BioOne “charter supporters”—received a subscription-fee credit equivalent to at least 115% of their initial support. Libraries were also given the option to become BioOne “sponsors” by pledging an additional $5,000 or more that would not be eligible for a subscription credit.

The response from the community exceeded even the highest expectations. BioOne received a total of $688,000 from 128 institutions: $559,500 of this from charter supporters, with 27 of those same institutions pledging an additional $128,500 of sponsor support. Given the strained library budgets at the time, these institutions committed to invest in a project that, despite everyone’s best intentions, could very well have failed. This community support further demonstrated the necessity of and demand for a viable alternative to the pricing practices of commercial publishing.

Charter Supporters & Sponsors

American Museum of Natural History
Arizona State University*
Baylor University*
Boston College
Bowdoin College Library
Brandeis University
Bingham Young University
Brown University Library
California Digital Library*
California Institute of Technology
Claremont Colleges
Colorado State University
Columbia University*
Cornell University
Creighton University
Dartmouth College*
Drexel University
Duke University
Eastern Michigan University
Eckerd College
Florida Atlantic University
Florida State University
Franklin and Marshall College
Georgetown University
Georgia Institute of Technology
Gettysburg College
Harvard University*
Indiana University
Iowa State University*
Johns Hopkins University
Kansas State University*
Laval University*
Linda Hall Library
Louisiana State University
Macalester College
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
McGill University
McMaster University
Michigan State University
Mississippi State University
Montana State University
North Carolina State University
Northeastern University
Oberlin College
Ohio State University
Ohio University
Oklahoma State University*
Oregon State University
Pennsylvania State University
Pennsylvania State University Park
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
Rice University
Santa Clara University
Southern Illinois University
State University of New York at Albany
State University of New York at Stony Brook
Syracuse University*
Texas A&M University, College Station*
Texas Christian University
Texas Tech University*
Tufts University
University of Alabama at Birmingham
University of Alberta
University of Arizona*
University of Arkansas
University of British Columbia
University of California-Berkeley
University of California-Davis
University of California-Irvine
University of California-Los Angeles
University of California-San Diego
University of California-Santa Barbara
University of Chicago
University of Cincinnati
University of Colorado at Boulder*
University of Connecticut
University of Delaware
University of Florida
University of Georgia
University of Guelph
University of Houston
University of Illinois at Chicago
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
University of Iowa
University of Kansas*
University of Kentucky
University of Maryland
University of Massachusetts
University of Michigan
University of Minnesota
University of Missouri-Columbia*
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
University of Nevada-Las Vegas
University of New Hampshire
University of New Mexico*
University of North Carolina
University of Notre Dame
University of Oklahoma*
University of Pennsylvania
University of Pittsburgh*
University of Puget Sound
University of Richmond
University of Rochester
University of Saskatchewan
University of Tennessee
University of Texas at Austin*
University of Toronto
University of Utah*
University of Washington
University of Waterloo
University of Western Ontario
University of Windsor
University of Wisconsin-Madison*
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Utah Academic Library Consortium
Utah State University
Vanderbilt University*
Villanova University
Virginia Commonwealth University
Virginia Tech
Wabash College
Washington State University
Washington University, St. Louis
Wayne State University
Wesleyan University
Western Michigan University
York University

*Sponsors
BioOne’s successful capitalization was due in no small part to the extraordinary outreach efforts of its founding organizations and key partners. Notably, of the 123 total institutions pledging charter and/or sponsor support, 117 were members of SPARC (67% of the 175 total members), and 22 were BTP members. In addition to mobilizing member library support, new partners Amigos Library Services (joining in early 2000 to provide sales services in the US and Canada), and Online Computer Library Center, Inc. (OCLC) (joining in early 2001 for international sales), provided significant funds throughout BioOne’s early development through a novel “earn-back” arrangement.

As with the contributions of the library community, BioOne could not have successfully sustained its operations in these early days without such generous and well-timed support.

Over the next six years, BioOne returned $672,000 in subscription credits to its subscribing libraries—$112,500 over the initial charter support received. As a result, the organization was able to bring this landmark funding program to a close in early 2007, having repaid every charter supporter in full.

Partnering with Nonprofit Scientific Publishers

BioOne’s plans fell rapidly into place—more so than its founders had dared hope. With the initial financial and in-kind contributions from the scholarly and publishing communities, it was possible for those scientific societies wishing to participate in the aggregation to do so at no direct cost, and to expect a financial return from participation. The organization’s initial goal to reduce obstacles to electronic publishing for scientific societies gradually expanded to include meaningful contributions toward the financial sustainability of these same societies through a growing annual revenue share designed to supplement their individual institutional subscription earnings.

For societies already anxious about the stagnation or decline of their print subscriptions, the promise of a new revenue stream was enticing, as was the idea of a sophisticated electronic presence at no upfront cost. Furthermore, early participants were eager to join a publisher-library collaboration that balanced the financial needs of all stakeholders in the chain of scholarly communication, rather than favoring one at the expense of another.
At the heart of this effort was Howard Goldstein, BioOne’s chief advisor and business consultant from 2000 through 2009. As a senior publishing consultant with SPARC, Goldstein was involved with both the initial formulation of BioOne’s business model as well as its continued development over time to better meet the needs of all stakeholders. BioOne’s formula for compensating publishers—a calculation that is still consistently applied today—was one of Goldstein’s greatest contributions to the organization and the BioOne community.

As outlined in BioOne’s original Electronic License Agreement (ELA) signed by publisher participants, the amount earned by each publisher was structured as a “Revenue Share” that took into account both individual publications’ pro rata share of cumulative pages in the database and hits to abstracts and full-text content received during the given year. Fifty percent of the aggregation’s net subscription receipts comprised the Revenue Sharing pool, to be divided among participants. Thus, if the organization netted $400,000 in subscriptions after discounts, commissions, and taxes, $200,000 would go toward organizational expenses and overhead, while $200,000 would be distributed among publishing participants, relative to their content and usage contributions to the aggregation. While seemingly simple, this calculation—neatly balancing quality and quantity of contributed content—was ahead of its time, predating many of the usage-based compensation models that are increasingly common today.

There was no direct cost to participate in BioOne for society publishers, as the organization absorbed all related platform charges, including loading and quality control. Due to Allen Press’s generous in-kind contribution, Allen Press typesetting and printing clients received contributed content conversion to SGML (and later, to XML). Publications that were not clients of Allen Press saw a deduction from their annual Revenue Share for the actual per page cost of this conversion through 2008. BioOne began fully absorbing these charges in 2009.

Among the first group of journals to partner with BioOne for the aggregation’s anticipated launch in early 2001 were BioScience, published by the American Institute of Biological Sciences, Ambio, published by the Royal Swedish Academy of Science, The Bryologist, published by the American Bryological & Lichenological Society, and The American Biology Teacher, published by the National Association of Biology Teachers. These publications, along with 36 others, comprised the inaugural group of titles available at BioOne’s launch. Like their early library subscriber counterparts, these societies were willing to bet on the viability of BioOne before it had even begun. This extraordinary community faith in the new organization undoubtedly contributed to BioOne’s success.

Howard Goldstein was the very heart of BioOne from 2000-2009. With his premature passing, BioOne lost one of its most creative, dedicated, and determined progenitors.
BioOne Launches

On April 2, 2001, BioOne officially launched to the public, offering the current contents of 40 participating journals to an inaugural group of 320 subscribing libraries and institutions. The publications offered content beginning in 2000 through the present, with new articles published on the site simultaneous with, or shortly after, print publication. All titles were available in PDF and HTML formats, the latter generated from the SGML database, which offered a level of reference linking that was heretofore unimaginable for many of BioOne’s publisher participants.

At the helm of this effort was BioOne’s first full-time employee, President and Chief Operating Officer Heather Dalterio Joseph. Appointed in August 2000, Joseph previously served as director of publishing for the American Society for Cell Biology, and brought with her a keen understanding of both the needs of the nonprofit scholarly community and the new technologies that could be leveraged to meet those needs.

As exciting as the launch was after two years of intense preparation, BioOne’s leadership knew there was no time to rest. The aggregation was never envisioned as a stagnant collection, but rather as a growing group of titles, services, and functionality designed to attract more subscribers, publisher participants, and users around the world. Among other key priorities, BioOne recognized the early need to focus on interdatabase linking. By adopting emerging industry standards and enhancing interoperability, BioOne would be able to integrate its content with leading abstracting and indexing services, DOI assignment and reference linking through CrossRef, and taxonomic term linking through the Integrated Taxonomic Information System.

Joseph’s tireless campaign to promote BioOne’s mission and goals over the subsequent years promoted the organization’s expansion, resulting in a participant base of 53 publications at the end of 2002 and 68 at the end of 2003. Readership also saw marked increases, with total hits to content almost tripling, from 837,315 in 2002 to 2,511,504 in 2003. Much of this usage growth was due to increased discoverability via the onset of Google indexing. With the assistance of both Amigos Library Services and OCLC, acting as domestic and international sales partners, respectively, BioOne’s subscriber base also grew from 446 at the end of 2002 to 510 by the end of 2003. The scholarly community had clearly embraced the BioOne proposition: offering library subscribers and the researchers they served easy, affordable online access to a wealth of content previously unavailable online.

BioOne’s most impressive statistical leap came in the financial return to publisher participants, which grew 32% in 2003, from $461,538 in 2002 to $609,491. 2004 also marked the first year that BioOne was able to distribute a Surplus Share to active participants. This second payment pool, allocated on the same basis as the Revenue Share, provided participants with additional earnings in years that BioOne enjoyed an operating surplus (with net operating income exceeding expenses). Though not guaranteed, BioOne has been able to return a growing Surplus Share to its participants every year since 2004.

In addition to sizeable gains in their BioOne earnings, beginning in 2003 publishers were also given the opportunity to participate in ancillary revenue programs, such as pay-per-view sales and Copyright Clearance Center rights and permissions. BioOne’s motivation to facilitate these services was to enhance distribution and awareness of participating titles, as well as to minimize society overhead and increase incremental revenue.
Key Changes in BioOne’s Business Model

Following two full years of operation, it was time for BioOne to assess the strengths and limitations of its business model in anticipation of future growth. Joseph and BioOne’s Board of Directors had always considered it critical to review and refine BioOne’s model as needed in response to collected data and community trends. This approach was designed to ensure that the organization could continue to evolve based on the changing needs of its stakeholders. Thus, with the aid of a second full time staffer, Director of Business Development Todd Carpenter, as well as consultant Mary Waltham, BioOne undertook a critical study of its operations in 2004.

The study, “A Survey of Business Trends at BioOne Publishing Partners and its Implications for BioOne” authored by Carpenter, Joseph, and Waltham, was awarded the 2005 Johns Hopkins University Press award for best article featured in portal: Libraries and the Academy during 2004. The purpose of the study was to analyze results from a 2003 SPARC-sponsored survey of 18 BioOne publishers, which collected data regarding content output, total circulation, and publishing revenue and expenditure. By compiling these data, the working group set out to determine the real costs of modern publishing and the publishing revenue necessary to support these critical activities. The revealing study compared BioOne publisher data to industry benchmarks and surfaced problematic trends in the long-term sustainability of BioOne’s publishing community. The fundamental conclusion was that many BioOne publishers were not able to recover their publishing costs with their existing publishing revenue. As libraries increasingly regarded their print subscriptions as duplicates to online subscriptions and cancelled these print subscriptions accordingly, year-on-year total society publishing revenue sharply declined. Although BioOne Revenue Share had originally been designed as “enhancement revenue,” it became clear that this income was not sufficiently counterbalancing escalating print subscription losses.

Given these results, BioOne understood that its success in the library market would begin to pose a threat to its publishers unless it recalibrated its operating model. The organization thus decided to make a multiyear business model shift to generate additional financial support for BioOne publishers. This strategy included containing BioOne expenses, the pursuit of growth opportunities in new sales markets, and the modest, but strategic increase (9% for 2005) in BioOne’s subscription rates. Recognizing that it would be essential to deliver this difficult message properly in a time of constrained library budgets, BioOne knew that increasing subscription costs was critical to the ultimate sustainability of not just BioOne, but of its publisher participants.
New Leadership and Organizational Expansion

In 2005, Heather Joseph elected to leave her position at BioOne for the executive directorship of founding organization SPARC. She remained a member of the BioOne Board of Directors through 2007, and continues as a close ally and source of wisdom and encouragement.

In the fall of 2005, following the interim leadership of consultant Howard Goldstein, Susan Skomal was appointed executive director and chief operating officer of BioOne. As director of publications for the American Anthropological Association, Skomal had spearheaded the launch of the association’s electronic platform, AnthroSource. This experience proved invaluable during Skomal’s tenure, as BioOne continued to be faced with the challenge of keeping pace amid rapidly expanding technological options.

Buoyed by its refined business model and increasing opportunities for collaboration with scholarly partners such as CrossRef, JSTOR, Portico, and LOCKSS, BioOne enjoyed tremendous growth, which necessitated an increased staff to manage its many partnerships. In the fall of 2006, BioOne headquarters staff increased to three. Mark Kurtz assumed the role of director of business development vacated by Todd Carpenter, who moved on to the managing directorship of NISO. Lauren Kane also joined BioOne in the newly created role of manager of library and publisher relations.

The need to provide a publisher-facing function at this stage of BioOne’s development was critical. It was important that BioOne establish closer relationships with existing publishers, especially as the organization had begun to see some attrition of its original participant base, with nine titles having departed between 2003 and 2005. Furthermore, BioOne’s publisher community was poised to expand dramatically in 2007 with the forthcoming launch of BioOne.2, BioOne’s second collection of journals.

BioOne Expands to Three Collections

Understanding that BioOne’s existing collection—84 titles from 64 publishers—was nearing capacity under the existing pricing model, and with ample feedback from librarians who had become leery of the “big deal,” in 2006 BioOne decided to create a new collection of titles to be available by separate subscription beginning in January 2007. BioOne.2’s inaugural group of 40 titles from 26 publishers was selected to complement a library’s subscription to the original collection, now called BioOne.1. In addition, BioOne’s three open-access titles—freely available to users irrespective of subscription—formed the BioOne Open Access Collection. Now a separately designated collection, BioOne OA would nearly quadruple in size over the next three years, in large part through a new partnership with Conservation International for inclusion of five of their prestigious titles. By expanding and enhancing the OA Collection, BioOne sought to accommodate the diverse needs of its publishing community, as well as to provide increased access to users. In so doing, BioOne also gained knowledge and perspective on alternative models that has served it well as the organization has evolved.
The library community’s early reaction to BioOne.2 was mixed. Some applauded BioOne’s inclusion of small, niche publications, many of which were published by natural museums and regional societies and might otherwise disappear without an electronic presence and the support of a new revenue stream. Other librarians, suffering from increasing budget constraints, felt unable to provide this second collection with the same support as they had BioOne.1 during its nascent stage. Some were concerned that BioOne.2, in its current form, would not meet their needs and, consequently, might not be sustainable.

In response to these concerns, BioOne designed a targeted content development plan that focused BioOne.2 acquisitions on ISI-ranked and international publications with a broader scope. It did not abandon the needs of its existing cohort of publishers, but sought to make the second collection more attractive to subscribing libraries and the research community. In large part, this strategy has proven successful. At launch, BioOne.2 included 40 titles, with only 35% ranked by ISI and 28% based outside the US. For the 2009 subscription, BioOne.2 included 57 titles, 56% ranked by ISI and 26% based outside the US. This change in acquisitions strategy was responsible for a shift in subscriber interest in the growing package. After only three years in operation, BioOne.2 boasted 559 subscribers—indicating a strong trajectory not unlike BioOne.1’s early growth.

BioOne.2 Content Development and Subscriptions 2007–2009

Sustainability for BioOne Publishers

Amid BioOne’s fundamental adjustments—a business model shift in 2004 and an increase in services and programs in 2005 and 2006—it was critical that BioOne consult its original publisher participants to assess whether BioOne participation provided a sustainable financial position. In January 2007, once again with the generous support of SPARC, BioOne surveyed BioOne.1 publishers to obtain longitudinal data relating to institutional subscription and pricing trends for active BioOne publications. In addition to the evident benefit of aggregate results to inform BioOne’s strategic long-term vision, the organization also saw a critical opportunity to provide individual participating publishers with data-driven analyses tailored to assist their own publishing program strategy. Furthermore, the analysis was evidence of BioOne’s continuing commitment to learn from its stakeholders and to make adjustments as needed to stay relevant amid the changing publishing environment.
Thirty-one publishers representing 39 participating titles (more than half of the 75 active BioOne.1 titles) answered BioOne’s call for data. The results of the aggregate analysis proved positive, indicating that 87% of responding journals had earned a significantly higher overall publishing income as a result of being in BioOne, with an average net gain of $18,800 per year following participation. This result quelled concerns that BioOne aggregated earnings were not compensating for losses to individual institutional subscriptions, and reinforced the organization’s 2004 business model shift as a solid step in the right direction.

Although BioOne had seen publisher attrition since its inception, the majority of departing titles were the flagship publications of large societies that required more funding than BioOne was designed to provide. As demonstrated by BioOne’s 2003 and 2007 publisher surveys, participation in BioOne would not benefit all publications. For very large titles, BioOne earnings could not compensate for escalating losses of more highly priced individual institutional subscriptions. Conversely, for very small titles, library budgets were too constrained to offer support on an aggregated subscription basis. Whereas BioOne needed publications relevant to its library subscribers and the research community, it also needed to present a fair and viable model to publisher and library participants alike. It thus became an important part of the organization’s transparent acquisitions policy to present potential publisher participants with conservative financial projections and a sober evaluation of their suitability for success in BioOne.

Governance

From its inception, BioOne benefitted from a dedicated board of directors, each of whom had a professional interest in its success, as well as a personal dedication to BioOne’s collaborative mission. These directors ensured that contributions from their respective organizations—whether financial or in-kind—were available at the critical moment. Having two members of each founding partner sit on the Board thus served the organization well during its developmental years. Over time, the board would expand to 12 members in order to broaden its publisher and library community representation.

As BioOne began to mature, the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002 came into force, introducing major changes to the regulation of corporate as well as nonprofit governance and financial practice. To ensure that the organization avoid even the appearance of affording any vendor an unfair competitive advantage, the Board amended BioOne’s bylaws to discontinue Allen Press’s representation on the Board of Directors. Today, Allen Press remains a Founding Organization with all due credit given for its significant contributions. The amended bylaws also reduced the number of appointed Founding Organization representatives from two to a single member from each, and increased membership to a maximum 15 directors. This allowed the Board to elect directors with diverse perspectives from throughout the scholarly community. In addition to the four Founding Organization representatives, the 2009 Board of Directors included three librarians, two provosts, two senior researchers, and two publishers. An Executive Committee, a Nominations and Board Effectiveness Committee, and Audit Committee were likewise added to enhance governance of this growing organization.
Rebranding and Platform Relaunch

At the time of BioOne’s launch in 2001, its online platform and supporting technology were extremely competitive. As a system custom tailored to provide aggregated content, it was state of the art and provided functionality that participating publishers could not have afforded on their own. Seven years later—eons in technological years—BioOne was keenly aware of the need to enhance its online presence with new user tools and features. Although the platform had not stayed stagnant—most notably, in 2006 all content was converted from SGML to XML, formatted according to the NLM DTD standard—there were many necessary reporting and branding features that were simply not possible to add to the existing information architecture. Faced with a “build or buy” decision, BioOne decided that its board-designated technological fund’s greatest service to the publisher and library participants would be to license existing platform technology. This strategy thus put the onus of keeping current and competitive in a technology vendor’s capable hands.

In early 2008, after a lengthy proposal process with leading industry vendors, BioOne signed a new agreement with its longtime technology partner, Allen Press, to migrate the aggregation to a new platform powered by Atypon Systems, Inc. Atypon would provide the initial platform build and ongoing technological development, while Allen Press would remain BioOne’s chief technology partner, managing the platform and offering critical customer service to the BioOne community.

Migration to this new platform was a lengthy, intensive process, aided by a constant feedback loop from BioOne’s publishers, librarians, and end users to evaluate the essential features for inclusion. At the same time, BioOne understood that the platform launch in January 2009 would be more than just a technological reboot, but a true “relaunch” for the organization. As such, BioOne decided to simultaneously undergo a rebranding effort, developing a new visual identity to accurately reflect the aggregation’s content focus and the essence of its mission. Both the new identity and the site’s information architecture were deftly managed by Bremmer & Goris Communications. The resulting logo and identity standards gave the organization a fresh new look for its relaunch, and were warmly received by the BioOne community.

BioOne’s original logo was created in 2000 by Kevin Osborn, Research & Design. The new logo was created in 2008 by Bremmer & Goris Communications following a thorough rebranding campaign.

In addition to these technological and marketing changes, in 2008 BioOne also underwent a major overhaul of its sales strategy, opting to consolidate sales through a single global provider. The organization remains indebted to the hard work and dedication of Amigos Library Services, which provided BioOne with North American sales from its inception, and ProQuest/CSA, which provided BioOne with international sales beginning in 2006, following the service of OCLC. Beginning in the fall of 2008, Publishers Communication Group (PCG) was hired to manage BioOne’s global sales efforts, providing two essential services: a natively branded BioOne sales team, as well as librarian support and training worldwide.

On January 28, 2009, BioOne officially launched its new site, and with it, a suite of new services, tools, and reporting capabilities for its community members. For researchers, the platform offered a user-focused interface including personalized “My BioOne” profiles, e-alerting, RSS feeds, and toll-free linking. The latter, a popular feature pioneered by HighWire Press, allowed users to navigate to referenced articles across all BioOne collections, irrespective of subscription. For subscribing libraries, BioOne offered an increase in branding and core reporting functionality, including the easy download of COUNTER statistics and MARC records, Open URL compliance, and Shibboleth-supported access, all through a librarian administration interface. For participating publishers, the new platform provided a self-administration function, with previously unavailable branding, customization, and promotional opportunities, including dedicated informational pages for each publication and affiliated society.
Ten years ago, the collective efforts of a dedicated group of individuals, institutions, and organizations forged an idea for a unique collaboration that changed the landscape of bioscience research publishing. Even with the support of so many dedicated partners, the odds for success were slim. At the close of 2009, BioOne had not only survived the tests of time but had thrived. Its 2009 collections featured 154 titles from 118 nonprofit societies, associations, museums, and institutional presses. Over its first decade in operation, BioOne returned over $13 million to its participants through Revenue and Surplus Sharing, and provided critical funds to support their publication programs over both the short and long term. In addition, BioOne disseminated its content to a growing global audience of over 4,000 libraries in 132 countries. Finally, BioOne’s over 600,000 pages received over 12 million user hits to abstracts and full texts in 2009, totals that will continue to grow each year.

BioOne has made good on its mission to provide low-cost access to critical bioscience research, while maintaining a more equitable and sustainable financial balance between content producers and content consumers. There is nevertheless much more to accomplish, and new paths to forge. BioOne could not have succeeded without the foresight, creativity, and collaboration of the academic community. Just as BioOne itself, this history is dedicated to this community. From all of us at BioOne, thank you.

**Works Consulted**


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