

Report of the Committee on Publications for the Year Ending June 30, 1998

According to Editor Rosalind Reid, a major achievement of *American Scientist* in recent years has been establishing a stable formula of articles, departments and overall content. This formula appears to be agreeable to Sigma Xi members and *American Scientist* authors, as expressed by a note from one renewing member: "Don't change *American Scientist*!" All the same, there have been evolutionary changes within the formula, for example the redesign of the "Scientists' Bookshelf" and the acquisition of more articles in the dynamic area of molecular biology.

The magazine's efforts in the past year were rewarded by a first-place award in the annual Excel Awards competition sponsored by the Society of National Association Publications. The Gold Award in the feature-article category went to "Condoms and the Prevention of AIDS," in the issue of July-August 1997. The year also brought modest increases in individual subscriptions and newsstand sales. Compared to a total of 63,661 single-copy sales for the six issues published in fiscal year 1997, the first five issues of fiscal year 1998 (the only ones for which figures are available so far) sold 65,840 copies on the newsstand.

Advertising sales were less successful, prompting new Associate Publisher Kate Miller to make changes. Advertising revenue dropped from \$194,673 to \$154,104 (from 53 pages to 47). As a result, the management of advertising sales, which had been handled by outside advertising representatives, was brought in house, effective May 1, 1998. Commitments for new advertising contracts promise higher advertising revenues in fiscal 1999. A survey of *American Scientist* readers was conducted this year by MediaMark Research, Inc.; the results made it possible to revamp and update the media kit used to present the magazine to potential advertisers.

The magazine's circulation (unaudited) as of June 1998 was 95,290, a decline of about 1,000 from a year earlier. A breakdown of the figures shows that a drop of about 3,700 in Sigma Xi members was largely offset by the increases in individual subscriptions and single-copy sales. A shift to a new newsstand distributor, the firm ADS of Chicago, went smoothly in the spring. With the May-June issue, the magazine began to appear in more bookstores, a venue more appropriate for single-copy sales than the primary outlets served by the former distributor, Warner Publisher Services.

Efforts to increase *American Scientist's* royalty income are bearing fruit. Revenue from royalties and permissions increased some 40 percent, augmented by income from a new arrangement with the Copyright Clearance Center allowing "repertory licensing" to organizations that regularly make photocopies of *American Scientist* articles. This spring Sinauer Associates published two collections of articles from the magazine: the second edition of its best-seller *Exploring Animal Behavior* and a new volume, *Exploring Ecology and Its Applications*. Royalties from these collections will begin to be paid in fiscal year 1999.

One new editor has joined the staff this year: Bill Cannon, who replaced Hannah Andrews on her retirement as book-review editor in January. He immediately supervised the redesign of the "Scientists' Bookshelf" and also launched an on-line book discussion group.

American Scientist's first three-year contract with the Lane Press expired at the end of the fiscal year. The magazine solicited competing bids to enable it to consider alternative proposals that with changes in technology might reduce printing costs. The editors' relationship with the Lane Press has been a good one, however, and they have been pleased with the quality of the printed product. After the bidding it was clear that the prices and technology Lane Press can offer are still competitive. A new contract with Lane Press was signed in the spring, giving the magazine protection against cost increases for the near future.

Meanwhile technological change proceeds apace at the magazine itself. During the year the editors monitored changes in available computer equipment while adapting the magazine's aging Macintosh network to cope with the increasingly sophisticated graphics produced in house and by the authors. In the end, for reasons of economy, a decision was made to buy five Intel-based personal computers for the editors, so that the magazine will have what is called a mixed-platform network. To facilitate this transition the magazine is developing "browser-based" tools for sharing and updating databases (such as the author-title, book and copyright databases) in house and hopes that these tools will some day allow it to offer on the Internet services often requested by librarians and subscribers.

Much thought and effort has gone into the redesign of the Web site. The site's graphical format has been enhanced to improve navigational tools and to make it more attractive to visitors. *American Scientist* has launched, with support from the Committee on Programs, the AmSci Forum, a moderated on-line discussion of a selected article topic from each issue; it is a vehicle for Sigma Xi members and other readers of the magazine to interact intellectually with it. The site now offers an expanded array of links to Internet resources for the exploration of articles by readers. It even challenges the reader with a regular Puzzler created by the magazine.

With the acquisition of software to analyze traffic on the site, *American Scientist* can now look at how readers use it and even offer Web-site pages to advertisers. The statistics show that most of the traffic on Sigma Xi's Web server is generated by *American Scientist* pages and that an impressive number of visitors spend a considerable time at the site. The average user session lasts 8.45 minutes, and overall the Sigma Xi site delivers an average 26,000 user sessions, 85,000 page impressions and 303,000 successful "hits" (download of a page or graphics) per month. Much of this traffic is from overseas, and the magazine handles a significant volume of reprint-

permission requests from people from overseas who have learned about it by visiting its Web site.

To the Chair of your Committee on Publications it seems that *American Scientist* stands at the forefront of modern publishing, where print and electronic media combine to create a channel of communication that has a capacity much greater than the sum of its parts.

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