

OUTLINE OF A RATINGS-BASED ELECTRONIC PUBLISHING SYSTEM

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I describe here how publications such as books and articles can be organized in an electronic archive that constantly evaluates the quality of its contents and pays the authors according to the quality of their work and the degree to which their work is accessed.

I invented the system out of my own frustrations with publishing through academic journals and the internet. I find that journal publications involve long time delays and don't convey the ideas contained in articles to a large enough audience. The internet is a potential solution since access to a large audience is quick and easy. But there is currently no means of assessing how credible the material uploaded on a website is. The system I propose here is an attempt to combine the best of both worlds, i.e. the credibility of journals with the speed and accessibility of the internet.

The basis of the system I propose is its rating structure.

Each article has ratings in a number of different fields, where fields such as art, history, science, or perhaps the entire Dewey Decimal range, apply. An article's rating in a field is a weighted average of the ratings given by its readers in that field, depending how highly rated those readers are.

For example, we would not expect an artist without an engineering background to be able change the engineering rating of an article on optimal pipe sizes. Similarly, we would not expect an engineer without an art background to be able to change the rating of an arts article.

In other words, there are not only article ratings, but user ratings as well. When a user submits his opinion (his rating) for an article, then that article rating is weighted by that user's rating. The user's rating is itself obtained depending in how well a user's articles in that field have done.

Such a system would work only if there were some incentive for people not only to submit articles, but ratings as well. Taking the realistic rather than the idealistic viewpoint, the only incentive for people to make such contributions would be the financial incentive. In other words, people will have to be paid for authoring an article and for submitting ratings.

One form of income would be subscription to the system. For example, if each user subscribed at a rate of \$10 per month, and if there were a hundred thousand users, then the system would receive an income of \$1m per month.

This income would then be distributed among the users based on how well their articles are doing and how highly their ratings are sought after. For example, if a user writes an article that becomes famous and highly rated, then he may claim a certain value for his article. Let's say that his article was rated at a value of 5 and it was downloaded 20 times in a certain

month. That article then has a value of 100 for that month. Let's say that the total value of the system (obtained by multiplying the rating of each article by the number of times it was downloaded and adding it all up) was 200,000. Then the payout to the author of that article for that month would be $\$1m \times 100/200,000 = \50 , which is five times more than his subscription fee. If he has many articles that are highly rated, then his income is potentially quite substantial.

So much for incentives for writing articles. To encourage users to rate articles, a certain fraction, perhaps 20%, must be reserved for paying readers for submitting their ratings of articles. These funds would be distributed among the users depending on their user ratings. That is, if two people rate an article, then the most highly rated user will receive a greater share of the funds allocated for rating that article. Given that submitting a rating involves far less work than writing an article, any incentive would encourage rating activities.

The payouts are even greater if, in addition to subscription income, the system also receives what I call directed donations. Let's say a medical research foundation is looking for the cure to a particular disease. This foundation could make a directed donation, or a donation that will increase the payout to people who are writing articles on the curing of that disease. Again, the payout will be based on the value of the articles in that field. In fact, to encourage intellectual growth in any country, each government contributes substantially to its researchers that publish in accredited journals. If accreditation is equated to rating beyond a certain value, then these donations could be directed to citizens of that country publishing on the system. If, for example, the US government were to donate \$1m to US citizens, then the authorship payouts to US citizens would be substantially greater, encouraging its writers/researchers to produce more and better quality articles.

In fact, countries typically contribute a lot more than \$1m to universities for academics to be rewarded for their publishing efforts; the numbers run into the 100s of millions of dollars.

Another potential contributor, or directed donor, would be industry. For instance, if a petrochemical company were to make available \$50,000 for measuring the chemical equilibrium of a particular reaction system, these funds would be distributed among the researchers that contribute to this topic, depending on the ratings of their articles.

In other words, there is much potential for highly rated writers and researchers to earn an excellent income through such a system.

To learn more about this project, please make use of the contact details given on the following page.

Please assist us in getting this project off the ground by answering the following questions:

1. Do you believe that this idea has merit, and is worth implementing?

2. Do you have any suggestions as to how the system might be improved, or any solutions to potential problems that you foresee? (Please consider visiting the website ... and reading more about the project before submitting your response.)

3. What monthly subscription fee would you be willing to contribute for membership to this system? Remember, the greater subscription fee, the greater will be the payout to the contributing authors and raters.
 - a. \$5
 - b. \$10
 - c. \$30
 - d. Other amount: \$ _____

4. Should you wish to do so, please list your contact details below:
 - a. Name _____
 - b. Title and position in organization _____
 - c. eMail address _____
 - d. Telephone (1) _____
 - e. Telephone (2) _____
 - f. Telephone (3) _____
 - g. Postal address _____

5. Should you wish to do so, please make any other comments below:

Thank you for your assistance.

You may also return this response as an email attachment to r2@chemeng.uct.ac.za
Or mail to R. Rawatlal, Department of Chemical Engineering, University of Cape Town, Cnr Ring Road and South Lane, Upper Campus, Rondebosch 7701