

**Notions of Copyright in an Open Access Journal:
First Monday's Perspectives**

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Introduction: A Brief History of *First Monday*

First Monday is one of the first openly accessible, peer-reviewed journals on the Internet, solely devoted to research about all aspects of the Internet. Since its start in May 1996, *First Monday* has published 802 papers in 133 issues; an average monthly issue contains six research papers, plus on occasion book reviews, interviews, and editorials. Papers in *First Monday* have been written by 964 different authors representing largely academic institutions located in over 30 different countries. In addition, eight special issues have appeared, focused on the proceedings of different conferences or special topics.

First Monday was born in the summer of 1995 in a proposal by me to the Danish publisher Munksgaard, to start a new Internet-only, peer-review journal about the Internet. Munksgaard, an internationally renowned publisher of scientific and medical journals, agreed to publish the journal in September 1995. I began to organize an editorial board as well as a group of senior editors to manage the journal.

Esther Dyson was the first to join *First Monday* as Consulting Editor and Rishab Aiyer Ghosh was invited as International Editor. An Editorial Board was formed, initially including Vint Cerf, Tony Durham, Ed Krol, Bonnie Nardi, Ian Peter, and Rich Wiggins. There are now 8 different editors plus 18 members of our editorial board.

In October 1995, I met with Dyson and Anders Geersten, then Vice President of Journals for Munksgaard in Copenhagen, to discuss how the journal might work. The name of the journal was chosen, *First Monday*, based on its planned frequency, with issues appearing on the first Monday of every month.

Munksgaard's graphic designer developed a distinctive graphic design and interface for the journal, and Mondo Media in Copenhagen (then a subsidiary of Munksgaard) handled mark-up, illustrations, and other duties for each issue.

Manuscripts were solicited over the next few months. A scheduled first issue on January 1996 was postponed due to a lack of high-quality papers. Finally, by early spring 1996, we had on hand a group of excellent papers, ready for publication. The first issue appeared at the Fifth International World Wide Web Conference in Paris, on the first Monday in May 1996. At the Conference, diskettes with the first issue were distributed, plus shirts with the distinctive *First Monday* logo. The server was accessible from Copenhagen at www.firstmonday.dk and press releases were widely distributed online.

The original publication model devised by Munksgaard and the editorial staff provided open access to *First Monday* for its first year, if readers registered with Munksgaard and secured a password. A password permitted access to both the current issue and all archival issues. A subscription fee of 100 Danish kroner was suggested (about US\$15 at the time), but this fee was absolutely not required. In May 1997, on *First Monday's* first birthday, open access to the entire content of *First Monday* was provided, without passwords or fees. Of course, the term "open access" was not in common use at this point in time. *First Monday* was one of the first scholarly journals making its content freely available on the Internet. As of 18 May 2007 the *Directory of Open Access Journals* at Lund University listed 2,686 open access scholarly journals (this directory started in February 2003). Just to be clear, open access means that a journal does not charge its readers or institutions a fee for access. Readers can read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full text of articles without cost or penalty.

In 1998, Munksgaard decided to sell *First Monday*. Esther Dyson and Rishab Ghosh joined me in purchasing *First Monday* from Munksgaard in December 1998. The server was moved from Copenhagen to Chicago and the University of Illinois at Chicago University Library. The technical staff of the Library agreed to provide a server and support for *First Monday*, and this support continues to this day. *First Monday's* address changed from www.firstmonday.dk to

firstmonday.org, with pointers from www.firstmonday.dk to firstmonday.org to provide a smooth transition for all of *First Monday's* readers.

There have been two *First Monday* conferences, which took place in 2001 and 2006. The first conference occurred in Maastricht at the International Institute of Infonomics. This conference was strongly supported by the European Commission and Maastricht University. Some two hundred participants attended the event with speakers from Europe, the United States, and Indonesia. The second conference took place last year in Chicago at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Over 300 participants from over 30 countries attended this conference, including many from Africa, Asia, South and Central America as well Europe and the United States. The second conference was supported by the Open Society Institute and the MacArthur Foundation.

***First Monday's* readers**

Who reads *First Monday*? An examination of *First Monday's* logs indicates that readers come to the pages of *First Monday* from 182 countries. Most of the readers to *First Monday* since 1999 however come from ten countries - the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, Germany, Japan, Denmark, France, and Sweden. Looking at the statistics in another way, 40 percent of all traffic to *First Monday's* servers comes from Internet users in the United States, 30 percent from Europe, and the rest from elsewhere in the world.

Can I be more specific about *First Monday's* readers? We purposefully do not collect personal information about our readers. Based on the logs for the servers for 2006, 45 percent of the requests for pages came from .com domains, 17 percent from .net, and 4 percent from .edu. I personally pay attention to readers coming to the servers from .gov addresses around the world since *First Monday* seems to be carefully read by at least some policymakers and bureaucrats but that seems on the order of one or two percent of total traffic. .mil addresses make up around .2 percent of all traffic. Various Google servers around the world direct over 30 percent of traffic to the *First Monday* servers (we maintain servers for both our old firstmonday.dk address as well as our current firstmonday.org address).

What do these readers look for on *First Monday's* servers? Since *First Monday* makes all of its archival content freely accessible, a great deal of traffic to the servers concentrates not on current, new content but old, archival content. As *First Monday* matures, more and more readers seek more and more archival content. Let me provide an example. In 2006, the most read top 10 papers in *First Monday* did not include one paper published in 2006! The most read papers in 2006 were published in issues appearing in 2005, 2002, 2001, 2000, 1999, 1998, 1997. As one goes back in time through *First Monday's* logs, more and more popular content comes from current issues. For example, in 1999, four of ten most popular papers were published during that year. But as

archival content grows, with parallel growth in citations and hyperlinks to the content, there is increasing traffic to old content rather than new content.

Several contributors to *First Monday* have stated that their papers in *First Monday* are their most read works of all of their publications. One frequent author to *First Monday*, Clifford Lynch of the Coalition for Networked Information, went so far to call *First Monday* a phenomenon, not a journal! Clifford's papers consistently rank as among the most read, year after year after year.

Overall, the number of successful requests for pages has increased significantly since 1999. In 1999, a little more than one million successful requests for pages were received on *First Monday's* servers. In 2006, over six million were received. We unfortunately do not have information on traffic to the server in Denmark for the period 1996 to 1998.

***First Monday's* Notions of Copyright**

From the beginning, I, and my editorial colleagues, insisted that contributors would retain all of their rights to their words published in *First Monday's* virtual pages. In the beginning, for a commercial publisher like Munksgaard, this was a difficult policy to accept. Munksgaard, like many scholarly commercial publishers that grew rapidly after World War II, claimed all rights

to scholarly works published in their traditional print-based journals. We argued that our authors would not publish with *First Monday* if they could not control their own words, and frankly we were ready to walk away from Munksgaard, if they did not agree. Munksgaard saw *First Monday* as an experiment, as a way to learn about this new Internet technology for scholarly publishing. *First Monday* meant that Munksgaard could risk everything, and not worry about losing control over the content of one of its traditional journals in medicine or the natural sciences. Eventually, Munksgaard agreed that authors could keep the rights to their words in *First Monday*, to do with them as they saw fit. All of this was decided at our first organizational meeting in October 1995.

What were the consequences of this decision? *First Monday* authors take their content and recycle it into papers published in other journals or magazines. Their papers are summarized in newspaper articles or popular magazines; translations appear in a variety of languages. One Hungarian journal frequently translates at least one *First Monday* article in each printed issue. We ask authors to include pointers to *First Monday* in these recycled efforts and most, but not all, remember.

A number of authors have taken their original works in *First Monday* and expanded them into books for a variety of publishers. Probably the most famous example was a paper published in the very first issue. Written by John

Seely Brown and Paul Duguid, “The Social Life of Documents” was an incredibly popular paper for *First Monday* in 1996. John and Paul received many requests to rework their paper. Harvard Business School Press eventually published in 2000 an expanded version of the paper as the book *The Social Life of Information*. It was reissued in 2002, and has appeared in translation in Spanish, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese.

In 1998, *First Monday* published a paper rejected by the American magazine *Harper's* as being too radical. Entitled “Digital Diploma Mills: The Automation of Higher Education,” Canadian David Noble challenged the enormous growth in online and virtual higher education in North America. This paper stimulated a great deal of feedback in papers published by *First Monday* as well as in other scholarly journals. David refined his ideas into book form in a book with the same title published in 1999 by Monthly Review Press. Also in 1998, *First Monday* published an interesting paper by Eric Raymond on software development entitled “The Cathedral and the Bazaar.” This paper was also expanded into a book with a slightly longer title of *The cathedral & the bazaar: Musings on Linux and open source by an accidental revolutionary*, published by O'Reilly and Associates in 1999 and revised in 2001. I know of at least 14 books based on papers published in *First Monday*.

In addition, *First Monday* has had a healthy working relationship with MIT Press since 1999. In 1999, one of *First Monday's* founding editors, Bonnie Nardi now

at the University of California Irvine, was publishing her second book with MIT Press entitled *Information Ecologies: Using Technology with Heart*. Bonnie secured permission from MIT Press to run three chapters from the book in *First Monday* simultaneously with the book's release in May 1999. Bonnie and MIT Press monitored sales of the book and noted a distinct spike of increased sales as a consequence of the availability of some of the book's content in the journal. Inspired by these results, *First Monday* has published in its virtual pages portions of three other MIT Press books. We have also published excerpts of books from the Harvard Business School Press, IEEE (Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers or Eye-triple-E) Press, and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Since 2004, *First Monday* has encouraged its authors to consider Creative Commons licensing for their work. For the past two and half years, about 50 percent of *First Monday's* contributors have selected some flavor of a Creative Commons license. The most common license selected by contributors seems to be one that insists on attribution, noncommercial use, and freedom to copy, distribute and transmit a given work.

I, and my fellow editors, think this policy of allowing contributors to control their words is really not a very radical notion. Scholarly communication in many ways has been warped for the past six decades by the policies of commercial publishers, claiming all rights to works published in highly profitable

specialized journals. We see a victory for scholars and libraries in the growing trend by commercial publishers to allow authors to retain rights to their works, to reuse them in classes, to post them on institutional depositories or personal Web sites, to share digital copies with colleagues. We are optimistic that this trend will continue.

We also feel that our policy of giving authors their rights makes them in some way each an owner of *First Monday*. Imagine a publishing giant like Wiley or Elsevier considering the acquisition of *First Monday*. Not only would the publisher have to negotiate with me, Esther Dyson, Rishab Ghosh, and the University of Illinois at Chicago. They would also have to negotiate with each contributor to *First Monday* - all 964 of them! - since each owns their work. I see these 964 other owners of *First Monday* as real buffers to any hostile takeover of the journal by another publisher. Our copyright policy in a sense acts as a barrier, protecting the independence of *First Monday*.

The Future

First Monday is migrating its content to a new scholarly journal management system called Open Journal Systems. This open source software is freely available from Simon Fraser University and the University of British Columbia. It will simplify the production process in creating the monthly and special issues of *First Monday*. It will make much more transparent the editorial and

review processes in place for editors, contributors, and readers. We anticipate completion of this new step for *First Monday* in the next few months.

Additionally we are experimenting with new ways to deliver content to followers of *First Monday*. Several of my students have been creating a series of audio interviews that will be available in a variety of formats this summer. There are several sites that are actively looking at making translations of First Monday content available on a routine basis. We are looking at production on a continuous cycle as papers are accepted for publication.

Because *First Monday* has no income, we are dependent on a variety of individuals to assist us with editorial work, locating manuscripts, reading and commenting on prospective works, doing markup and language editing, and creating graphics. We have been fortunate to have the ongoing support since 1999 of the University of Illinois at Chicago in providing servers, excellent network bandwidth, and creative technical support. *First Monday's* future is largely in the hands of all our supporters, each owning their own little part of this journal. I am quite optimistic about the growth of *First Monday* in the future as one of the most important open access journals on the Internet, about the Internet.

Thank you.