

## *Journal of Diabetes Science and Technology:* Evolution of an Electronic Journal

Lutz Heinemann, Ph.D.

When I began working as managing editor of *Journal of Diabetes Science and Technology* (JDST) in August 2011, I was not quite sure what this meant in reality. With each day, I realized that it involves a good number of emails, increasing each and every day, and a lot of things to learn. It also means fun. For example, you read the (detailed) response letters of authors who write many sentences as to why this or that comment of a reviewer is wrong or right but at the same time, are very reluctant to change a single sentence in their manuscript—more about this a little later. Sometimes, I also get shocked when I encounter clear cases of plagiarism. But at first, you have to see and accept how many “stories” are going on in an active journal/editorial office. The truth is that each and every manuscript has its own story. Almost always, there are some special issues here or some trouble there. It takes some time to learn this game, and it requires highly efficient handling in the editorial office not to get lost. On the other side, it is as a big honor to work with David Klonoff and the editorial team of JDST (mainly, Vanessa Ta, Jiji Reyes, and Yoram Tamir), and my hope is that my efforts will somehow contribute to improving the quality and acceptance of our journal even further over the coming years.

This might be an unusual editorial, but having been onboard this ship for several months now allows me to reflect on some aspects I believe might be of interest to our readers. With this opinion piece (the true meaning of an editorial), I also hope to clarify some topics in the

interest of our journal. As a scientist, I will bring some data to the table as well. The source of these data is a well-maintained database in which each and every bit of email from the editorial office is documented along with each reviewer, deadline information, and the topics of manuscripts. There is room for a more in-depth analysis of the database in order for us all to learn some lessons, including those of us at the editorial office.

### Background

*Journal of Diabetes Science and Technology* is one of two leading journals that focus on diabetes technology and related topics. This journal is published by the Diabetes Technology Society, a nonprofit organization headed by David Klonoff. This organization, which also organizes three different diabetes technology meetings (scientific, clinical, and hospital), aims to support the acceptance and application of diabetes technology in many fields.

To our knowledge, JDST is the only journal in diabetes science that is published exclusively in electronic format. We see two major advantages in this:

- Speed of publication (we aim for a 3-month turn-around time). In the first 5 years of operation, the length of time between receiving and publishing a manuscript was  $130 \pm 71$  days (mean  $\pm$  standard deviation). We will do our best to shorten the turn-around time to fulfill our own goals (also

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**Author Affiliation:** Science & Co., Düsseldorf, Germany

**Abbreviations:** (JDST) *Journal of Diabetes Science and Technology*, (PDF) portable document format

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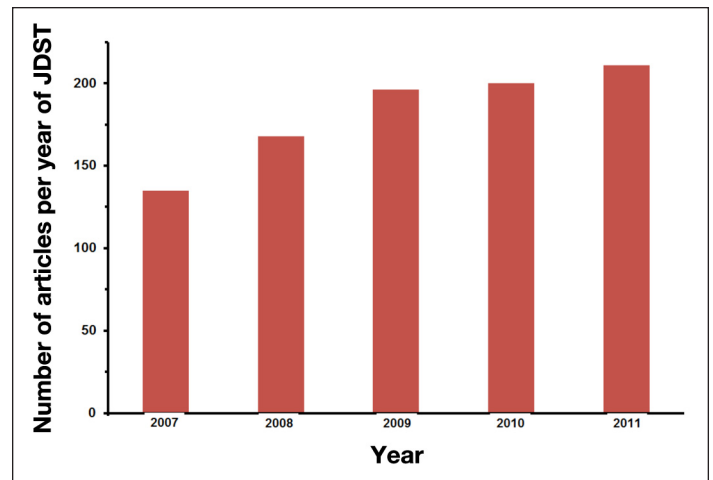
**Corresponding Author:** Lutz Heinemann, Ph.D., Science & Co., Kehler Str. 24, 40468 Düsseldorf, Germany; email address [lutz.heinemann@profil.com](mailto:lutz.heinemann@profil.com)

by cutting down the number of articles per issue, discussed later).

- Cost reduction (printing press is not involved). I do not know what most people do, but I read only the online tables of content of journals such as *Diabetes*, *Diabetes Care*, and *Diabetologia* and download portable document format (PDF) files of the articles that I am interested in. When the printed journals are delivered some weeks later, I discharge these expensively printed and shipped “books” (they are not journals anymore because they are so thick and heavy) directly into the paper waste box. So I am no longer certain about the need for having printed journals in our modern electronic world; PDFs stored electronically are not only much more friendly to our environment, they are also much easier to find.

## Number of Publications over the Past Years

*Journal of Diabetes Science and Technology* has been online now for 5 years; it started in January 2007. As shown in **Figure 1**, there is a steady increase in the number of articles published each year. One of the lessons I had to learn, even for an electronic journal, is that the number of the published articles matters. Even if the articles are not printed, there is a certain amount of work associated with each and every (PDF) page. In other words, the costs associated with online publication are considerably higher than I had anticipated. In contrast, one wonders how classic journals survive. Printed versions of journals include a number of advertisements while JDST has none, and this might be one of the reasons why a publisher still wants to print hardcopies. Nevertheless, an electronic journal must have a certain budget (not for the editor for whom there is practically no compensation) to perform all functions related. You would be surprised to learn how many people are behind the scenes taking care of typesetting and editing each page, maintaining the Web site, and producing each “issue.” Knowing the financial implications of each and every article and the increase in publication volume over the years, it is one of my tasks to keep JDST within “respective measures.” This careful wording indicates that I will endeavor to keep our journal focused, limit the number of articles per month, and aim for high-quality manuscripts at the same time. Likewise, this means that I have the unpleasant job of rejecting a number of manuscripts, sometimes immediately as they are submitted to us, because they do not fit into our scope, are not well written, or are of mediocre scientific quality. A manuscript may also be rejected as a result of



**Figure 1.** Increase in the number of articles published in the journal since 2007.

negative comments from peer reviewers, which means reviewers play a very important role in determining the fate of a manuscript (see next section).

## Quality of Manuscripts

To be honest, I have a very simple way of judging the quality of a manuscript: are the authors able to write a manuscript that describes scientific results in a manner that is of interest for myself, and am I able to understand the manuscript even if I am not an expert in a given topic? Some authors tend to forget that an article should be at least comprehensible for all readers of JDST and not only by the likely small number of colleagues who share expertise in a given topic. Sentences that are full of abbreviations that are not defined are simply boring because they have no meaning for the nonexpert. In this sense, writing scientific articles is an art. If authors are not able to convey their message in a manner that their audience can understand, this is not the flaw of their audience, but their own. Authors also have to accept that the reviewer comments could likely be the only direct feedback they will get from readers. If the author, for example, is not able to explain in a short introduction section (1.5 pages should be more than enough in most cases) why a given scientific/clinical question is of interest and formulate the main topic/question to be addressed in the manuscript at the end of this section, it spells trouble. I might be a simple (and stubborn) guy, but I do carefully check that each manuscript has a clear aim statement and structure. We also check that the length of the manuscript is in accordance with JDST’s guidelines for authors. Please expect some German precision on this end. We also try to avoid a product

name being mentioned repeatedly in a given manuscript, i.e., when the name of a blood glucose meter is stated 43 times in a manuscript, I assume you would understand my efforts in bringing this number down (to 1 to be precise).

In view of the considerable heterogeneity in the quality of the manuscripts that are submitted to JDST, one wonders how one might, as an editor, “teach” authors how to improve their writing. One possibility is simply to reject manuscripts promptly when their quality is not sufficient from my perspective. As stated earlier, there will be an increase in the number of manuscripts that are rejected at such an early stage in the review process for the reasons outlined earlier. I also reject manuscripts once I read the peer reviewer comments. For me, it is an enormous learning process (and sometimes I feel a bit ashamed) to read these comments about a manuscript, which I might have believed to be a good one, and how reviewers highlight numerous major and minor flaws. Some manuscripts are not accepted because authors fail to respond to the reviewers’ comments within the deadline. For an electronic journal aiming to publish a good manuscript in the shortest possible period, reducing handling time is an elusive goal, but we continue to try to improve upon this aspect.

## Reviewers

Many authors appear to take the comments of the reviewers personally and not as an attempt to improve the quality of the manuscript. Being an author myself, I can fully understand that, after you put all your energy and thoughts into writing a manuscript you regard as close to perfect, reading a long list of major and minor comments about more or less large “errors” you made is not heartwarming. Please accept the comments of your colleagues as a chance to further improve your work. For me, it is impressive to see not only how two reviewers can differ in their opinion about the same manuscript and in what they would consider as critical aspects, but also how they can differ in the amount of work and time that they are willing to invest in reviewing a manuscript. I have to acknowledge that some reviews were of no help at all whereas, in one case, the review was longer and more thoughtful than the manuscript itself.

To all readers of this editorial who are also reviewers for JDST, I would like to take the opportunity to say *thank you very much* for your never ending support of JDST and your willingness to review manuscripts several times each year. Especially, I thank the members of our

editorial board who are quite supportive with reviewing manuscripts. We are in the process of assessing and defining the role of the board members even further, and we might come along with some changes and new names soon. I fully acknowledge that not all manuscripts that are submitted for review may be top class; however, providing thoughtful reviews to the authors is probably the best (and only) way to improve the quality of the manuscript and possibly to prevent good scientific data from being disregarded and thrown away.

One of the most difficult tasks of an editor is to find and select good reviewers for a given topic. Although this is a relatively easy and straightforward job for those manuscripts dealing with a topic you are familiar with (in this case, you simply use your “old buddy network” until they signal that too much is too much), it can become tricky when you have a manuscript dealing with a topic that you have no clue about. In this case, you have to act like a detective, check the reference list for publications about the same or related topic(s), and/or search PubMed/Internet for a potential reviewer. I am pretty sure that some of the people we approach to be potential reviewers are quite surprised by how and why they were selected as reviewers.

## Summary

Being an editor of a journal is probably one of the best opportunities to lose many friends and generate many foes at the same time. If I send a manuscript back to the authors for the third time because the reviewers are still not satisfied with the revisions made and, as editor, I can understand the reviewers’ concerns and am not willing to accept the manuscript as it stands, the emotional reaction of the authors can come across even via email. Rest assured that I send the revised manuscript versions back to the reviewers only if I have the impression that the comments were not handled adequately.

I am fully aware that JDST has no impact factor, but I can assure you that this will change in the near future. Partly, this is simply a matter of time; a journal has to exist for a certain period before its impact can be evaluated. A second—more important—factor is the quality of the manuscripts that we are publishing. I strongly believe that we—that means you as the authors, you as the reviewers, and we as the editorial board—are on an excellent path toward an even better and stronger journal for all our readers.