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Hacking the Academy

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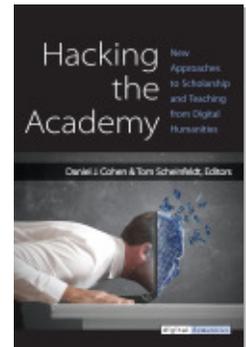
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Getting Yourself Out of the Business in Five Easy Steps

Jason Baird Jackson

Last year, did you get paid nothing to work hard for a multinational corporation with reported revenues of over a billion dollars?

If you have (1) done peer reviews for, (2) submitted an article to, (3) written a book or media review for, or (4) taken on the editorship of a scholarly journal published by giant firms such as Springer, Reed Elsevier, or Wiley, then you belong to a very large group of very well-educated people whose unpaid labor has helped make these firms very profitable. In turn, their profitability has positioned them to work vigorously against the interests of (1) university presses and other nonprofit publishers in the public interest, (2) libraries at all levels, (3) university and college students, (4) scholars themselves, and (5) particular and general publics with a need to consult the scholarly record.

I am not willing to freely give my labor to large multinational corporations whose interests align with their shareholders, but are antagonistic to my own. This is my view on one key aspect of scholarly communication today. Scholars can advance several different worthwhile causes by doing all that they can to stop becoming further entangled (individually and collectively) with for-profit scholarly publishers—particularly, the largest of the multinational firms that increasingly seek to exert a kind of hegemony over the entire domain of scholarly communication.

There is a great variety of steps that can be taken to build a different, more accessible, and progressive system of scholarly communication. My focus here is on five simple choices that scholars can make while sitting at their desks pursuing their own publishing work. These are choices that I have made and that I encourage my colleagues to consider making.

1. Choose not to submit scholarly journal articles or other works to publications owned by for-profit firms.

2. Say no, when asked to undertake peer-review work on a book or article manuscript that has been submitted for publication by a for-profit publisher, or a journal under the control of a commercial publisher.
3. Do not seek or accept the editorship of a journal owned or under the control of a commercial publisher.
4. Do not take on the role of series editor for a book series being published by a for-profit publisher.
5. Turn down invitations to join the editorial boards of commercially published journals or book series.

If taken, the preceding steps are individual in their point of action, even as they support a variety of more collective projects aimed at redirecting the scholarly communication system in more progressive, sustainable, and open ways.

If you care about university presses, these steps will help. If you are eager to resist corporate enclosure of public goods, resources, and ideas, they will help. If you care about reform in intellectual property systems, they will help. If you are worried that your college or university library is on the brink of financial collapse, they will help. If you want to make sure that your scholarship is as available as possible to colleagues, students, and the public, they will help. If you believe in open education and other approaches to transforming teaching and learning, they will help. If you are concerned about the harmful effects of media consolidation, they will help. If you are selfish and resent being taken advantage of, they will help.

What choices are you making? Are you ready to get out of the business?