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EBSCO Enters Into New Partnerships

Early this year, EBSCO Information Services announced two groundbreaking partnerships that extend the scope of its involvement in the scholarly information community. Its new partners, protocols.io and Code Ocean, both offer information-sharing services for scholarly researchers that complement EBSCO's traditional focus on scholarly articles and other published literature.

protocols.io was founded in 2012 by geneticist Lenny Teytelman and computer scientists Alexei Stoliartchouk and Irina Makkaveeva. It addresses a gap in the publication of research protocols, thereby improving the quality of genetic and other biomedical research. Scientists who focus on developing and improving protocols often have difficulty getting their work published in traditional peer-reviewed journals. protocols.io offers them a forum to share and discuss their research protocols. Code Ocean,

established in 2015 by Simon Adar and Ram Dayan, focuses on linking journal articles, code, and data. Its "compute capsules" overcome barriers that prevent researchers from reproducing results reported in scientific articles by re-creating the computer environment necessary to run the author's software, either with the author's own data or with new datasets. Its services are used by researchers in both physical and social sciences.

Both partnerships involve financial and other relationships. EBSCO's SVP of corporate development, Tommy Doyle, tells me that "there are two components" to each partnership. "One," he continues, "is that EBSCO has invested, and taken a minority position in, both companies. For protocols.io, EBSCO has a board seat, and for Code Ocean, we're one of the major investors, though we won't have a board seat." He adds, "The second component is that we will be representing both companies in the market. We will

be helping them scale up, reselling both platforms to our customer base globally."

THE RIGHT RECIPE

Doyle notes that these relationships represent an extension of EBSCO's services to the academic community. "The way that research has been communicated historically has always been through the academic paper," he points out. "The paper is still very important, but the paper doesn't include all the information that readers need to re-create, reproduce, and build on top of the work. Sharing the data is also really important, but sharing how that data was created is even more vitally important." Doyle likens the problem to that of the cook who has a list of ingredients but no instructions. Given the ingredients flour, sugar, yeast, and water, you can make either bread or beer—the difference is in the protocol, the steps in the process of combining them. protocols.io allows

researchers to share, discuss, and modify steps in their research protocols. Doyle adds that an example of this is the community of researchers working on combating COVID-19.

Doyle says, "Code Ocean is a natural sister company to protocols.io. It solves the [same] problem at a code level. More and more research depends on computational methods." He notes that GitHub is another solution for sharing code, but points out that it doesn't enable others to take code and run it in their own computing environment. That's because there are so many hardware and software dependencies that affect whether the code will run correctly. Code Ocean's compute capsules address that problem and allow users to run the code without reconstructing the entire computing environment.

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LIBRARIES' ROLE

Doyle portrays the partnerships as an important extension of EBSCO's mission. "Our mission has always been to improve lives by providing reliable, relevant information," he says. "We're helping 18,000 publishers distribute their content to 130,000 institutions. Tens of millions of people use our platform every day. So if these companies have solved a real problem in research, we need to help them gain sustainability and scale up their impact. We can help publishers connect to more reproducible research. We can help libraries take more steward-

ship over repositories with data management and archiving."

I ask how the partnerships will affect EBSCO's traditional library customer base, and Doyle says that while there could be enhancements to EBSCO databases, the primary impact has more to do with the strategic changes taking place in libraries. "Historically, libraries have focused on collecting information from the outside world and bringing it in to support research. As we move to a more open environment, libraries need to play a role in gathering the research from the institution and projecting it outward. We've heard from many of our library clients that they're struggling to meet researchers at the point of need, and that it's hard for the institution to gain stewardship over the assets the researchers are creating."

Many institutions are establishing data repositories as well as document repositories, of course, and libraries are often involved in, and even the leaders of, those efforts. However, Doyle points out a key difference between what the "plain vanilla" data repository provides and the services of protocols.io and Code Ocean. "Both include research data within the protocol or within the code capsule. They're open, web-based repositories and over time will be integrated into institutional data repositories. The idea is that institutions can have centralized platforms where researchers are doing their work. The library can connect with the platform to provide stewardship of their product." Doyle shares that the problem of data management and reuse is illustrated by a video, "Data Sharing and Management Snafu in 3 Short Acts," produced by the New York University Health Sciences Libraries. "It's a really funny video, but it's also sad, because it's so true, and it dates from 2012"—

LINKS TO THE SOURCE

protocols.io
protocols.io

Code Ocean
codeocean.com

"Data Sharing and Management Snafu in 3 Short Acts"
youtube.com/watch?v=N2zK3sAtr-4

and we're still struggling with the same challenges.

MAXIMUM VELOCITY

EBSCO's VP of communications, Kathleen McEvoy, comments that the integration of articles, data, and methods (protocols and code) represents the latest "transformation of information" dating back to 20th-century abstracting-and-indexing services. "Where once an abstract was, in effect, an advertisement for an article, now the article is an advertisement for the underlying data," she says.

Looking ahead, Doyle adds that EBSCO envisions more partnerships: "These are not the last two. EBSCO is a neutral middleman. We want to bring innovation into the ecosystem. We're not buying up the value chain. We're not trying to have a big walled garden. We're trying to create the conditions for companies that want to make research work better to get to scale, and sustainability, and impact. We're working with other companies and trying to bring them up to scale as well." McEvoy agrees: "An important factor is the wide reach of EBSCO. Companies like protocols.io and Code Ocean have the tools. We're giving them the velocity."

Dave Shumaker is a retired clinical associate professor at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., and a former corporate information manager. He is also the author of *The Embedded Librarian: Innovative Strategies for Taking Knowledge Where It's Needed* (Information Today, Inc., 2012), and he founded SLA's Embedded Librarians Caucus in 2015. Send your comments about this article to itletters@infotoday.com or tweet us (@ITINewsBreaks).