

Marketing Techniques for Open Access in the Health Sciences

(Written by Caitlin Pike, in no particular order...)

The Guilt Trip

I frequently use an emotional appeal with my nursing faculty...“You got into [health career] to help people, right? One of the best ways to help people through your research is for them to be able to read it. If they can’t read it, they can’t use or apply it.”

Ethical Appeal

People in developing countries don’t have access to the same research we do, nor do U.S. doctors unaffiliated with large health systems. Their work is valid and important, and frequently advances medical research and improves patient care. There is no reason to cut them out of scientific research simply because they aren’t financially able to subscribe.

Encourage Shameless Self-Promotion

Self-promotion is easier when articles are openly available to the public. This could be through an institutional repository, or publishing in an open access journal. If they say no one cares what they write, or they don’t do social media, explain that dissemination increases the likelihood of readers, which can potentially translate to citations. It also increases the likelihood that an article might be examined to change policy or best practice, which can be beneficial for demonstrating impact for their dossiers.

Increase Your Citation Counts

Open access articles can see up to an 18% increase in citation counts when compared to paywalled articles. An increase of up to 33% can be seen for articles published as green open access, but any open access type is likely to produce an increase. (Piwowar, et al., 2018) This is probably the biggest “seller”, as it’s the most tangible for demonstrating impact during promotion and tenure.

Speaking of Promotion and Tenure...

Publishing in open access journals (or using a repository) can get you more data points for promotion and tenure. Download counts and views accrue more quickly than citations, so it’s easier to demonstrate impact for more recent articles. Subscription journals are often reluctant to share granular, article-level data, whereas open access journals have no reason to keep that data hidden.

Explain the “Traditional” Metrics

The journal impact factor is a bad measure of individual quality and impact. Many faculty don't know how this number is calculated. I can often sway faculty (and particularly junior faculty) by explaining how the numbers are created. The [journal impact factor](#) is the number of citations, received in that year, of articles published in that journal during the two preceding years, divided by the total number of "citable items" published in that journal during the two preceding years. It has nothing to do with the individual faculty member's work, or even the "quality" of the journal. In the journal Nature, for 2015, almost 75% of the articles were cited less than the impact factor of 38.1. Only a few, highly cited articles drove the journal impact factor up, but that says nothing about the influence of the articles that weren't cited as much. Also, always try to say "journal impact factor" instead of "impact factor" to subconsciously remind them that it reflects the journal, not an individual article.

Peer-Review isn't Perfect

Speaking of journal quality, faculty are often quick to judge open access journals as "predatory" or without respectable peer-review processes. This simply isn't true, and there are hundreds of perfectly legitimate open access journals with high quality (and often transparent) peer review processes. It's also worth reminding faculty with this concern that "high impact" journals aren't perfect, either, and they're slow to admit their mistakes. After all, The Lancet published Andrew Wakefield's article falsely linking MMR to autism, which had incredibly flawed methods. Sure, it was retracted, but it's caused a public health crisis as a result.

Be Discoverable in Google Scholar

This one might not apply to you, but our campus has an institutional repository that is indexed by Google Scholar. I often tell faculty that adding their pre-prints to our IR will make them discoverable in Google Scholar, which gets them excited about doing it! It isn't the only way for them to end up in the search results, of course, but it is a guaranteed one.

Expanding the Idea of Open

Open access doesn't just include articles. It can be virtually anything. Sharing data, computer code, and educational resources are other ways that faculty can make their work freely available, and that can benefit them when it comes to submitting their dossier. All of these things add up to demonstrate the impact that an individual has had on their chosen field. The focus should be on the use and results of things, not on arbitrary numbers.

Explain the Game

This one is most effective for graduate students who will become academics and junior faculty. I simply explain the traditional publishing process and let them do the math. You're expected to produce articles

at a decent rate by virtue of being tenure-track faculty. You spend hours doing research and writing it up in article. Then, you submit it to a journal, who accepts it and publishes it. It might be a society journal, or an independent one, but either way, you don't get paid by the publisher to provide them the content that they sell. In many cases, they even sell it back to the very university that you work for, but if not, they are still charging \$30 or more per copy to those who don't subscribe. The subscriptions are even worse, though, because most journals cost thousands of dollars a year to subscribe to. Oh, and don't forget...you likely also serve as a peer-reviewer and possibly sit on an editorial board. That time is expected as part of your job, as performance or service, and it isn't paid for by the publisher. So, you are giving them free content and free labor...and they are making millions. (They usually get angry at this point and agree with me about open access, so I don't have to continue...)

References:

Piwowar, H., Priem, J., Larivière, V., Alperin, J. P., Matthias, L., Norlander, B., ... Haustein, S. (2018). The state of OA: a large-scale analysis of the prevalence and impact of Open Access articles. *PeerJ*, 6, e4375. <https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj.4375>

Callaway, E. (2016). Beat it, impact factor! Publishing elite turns against controversial metric. *Nature News*, 535(7611), 210. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nature.2016.20224>