

JSTOR: A History. By Roger C. Schonfeld. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003. xxxiv + 412 pp. Index, appendix, figures, illustrations. Cloth, \$29.95. ISBN: 0-691-11531-1.

Reviewed by David Morton

Roger Schonfeld's *JSTOR: A History* details the early history of one of the most notable academic success stories of the past decade—the creation of an important and widely used digital archive of academic publications, one that now includes works in dozens of fields in business and the arts and sciences. The story actually begins in the 1980s, when academic libraries were being overwhelmed financially and physically in their attempt to keep up with an exploding number of journal subscriptions. Ironically, technical innovations in computerized printing had rendered journal production relatively less expensive than before, but part of their effect was to make it easier and cheaper for new journals to get underway. University libraries, struggling to be comprehensive, were forced to acquire subscriptions in growing numbers, and with some journals entering their second century of publication, storing back runs was becoming a nightmare. Microfilm had been enthusiastically promoted by corporate vendors for decades, but it had proven expensive and inconvenient, and the quality of library copies was often poor. The idea of a digital library was in the air in the early 1990s, and it gained traction as more librarians and library patrons became accustomed to computer-based information retrieval.

In 1993 (the same year, incidentally, that the first version of the Mosaic Web browser became available), William Bowen (then president of the Mellon Foundation) learned of a new digital library project underway at Denison University in Ohio. Inspired, Bowen launched a similar project, sponsored in part by Mellon, to build a digital archive of academic journals, and this would come to be known as JSTOR (for “Journal Storage”). It is, unfortunately, difficult to summarize this book's content adequately because of the author's multiple narrative threads and meticulous attention to detail. Using a set of exceptionally well-preserved records, augmented by numerous personal interviews, Schonfeld documents the administrative history of JSTOR as it developed

from a pilot project, to an initial product, and then to a full-fledged enterprise between 1994 and 2001.

This study will be of use to historians interested in the dynamics of nonprofits and the like, particularly organizations whose business models depend on cutting-edge technologies. More generally, JSTOR's commercial history is informative because of its situation in the period from the mid-1990s, when JSTOR was first offered as a commercial product, to about 2001, when the "Internet bubble" officially burst. Those years will not be remembered for too many other new-media-startup success stories. Thus JSTOR's emergence as the basis of a self-sustaining enterprise is remarkable, both because the project survived the decade of the 1990s and because, unlike so many comparable efforts, it did not become overblown in the process. This book thus maps the path by which one organization traveled to economic self-sustainability, exploring each crossroad in some detail.

Schonfeld also aims, in this account, to provide a case study of some of the ways that institutional relationships between scholarly publishing and libraries shifted in response to technological changes in the 1990s. Where libraries had made halting progress toward creating shared bibliographic databases through projects such as OCLC (the Online Catalog of the Library of Congress), JSTOR pioneered in leading them further, toward a reliance on shared repositories of academic journals and other content as well.

Among the things that this book accomplishes, probably unintentionally, is to explode the myth (if it still needs exploding) that academic publishing is not ultimately driven by money. Although the monetary stakes involved were small by the standards of commercial publishing, Schonfeld repeatedly reveals the profit motive of academic presses and journal publishers (though, to his credit, he does not dwell upon them). The book documents, for example, the way that some publishers of academic journals, approached by the JSTOR promoters, displayed a proprietary attitude toward their archive of older journals, expressing deep concern that sales of the JSTOR archive would cut into their revenues, despite the fact that they had not gone out of their way to offer collections of back runs before. Such episodes highlight the fact that academic publishing by the 1990s had been transformed into something more like a for-profit enterprise, in

that publishers were loath to “give away” their old content, even in the interest of scholarship and education. Thus, on several different planes, scholars may find troves of useful information in Schonfeld’s informative and admirably well-written account.

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