

Digital scholarship will not be funded by the toothfairy: it is now time for academics online to tackle the economics of the digital field.

by Blog Admin

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Digital technologies are becoming an integral part of scholarly activities and open access scholarship has an important role to play in the digital scholar's workload but academics must think of how the economics of this will work. [Gill Kirrup](#) asks, who will pay for digital scholarship?



My colleague [Martin Weller](#) launched his new book, 'The Digital Scholar' recently. I haven't finished it myself but so far as I've got it's full of good ideas and is a great read. I'm a believer in the 'digital scholar' – someone who engages with digital technologies as an integral part of all their scholarly activities. I believe that blogs, [like my own](#), are part of scholarly practice.

Martin is not just a promoter of digital scholarship. For him, open access scholarship – free and open content – is integral to this new scholarship. This is the bit that still has me puzzled. Who pays the digital scholar for the time and expertise they put into producing their scholarly 'goods'? Who pays to host that scholarly content, and to make it freely accessible? Traditional hard copy commercial publishers do look like an outdated form of production and distribution of 'stuff' and many see that themselves. They are experimenting both with new media as well as with new services for both readers and writers. But moving away from hard copy to online doesn't move away from high-cost technological production to no-cost non-technological production.

It has been estimated that [Google alone has 900,000 servers, and Amazon at least 400,000](#). The same article that quotes these figures says that Amazon spent \$86 million on servers in 2008 alone. These are only two giants among many. I might give my writing for free – or as in most cases my University has paid for the time I have used to write – but why should someone pay for the server space to host my writing? We can guess the answer: while Google delivers content to us, it also delivers us and our information to the commercial world. We are becoming familiar with the saying: 'if you are not paying for the product, you are the product'. Is there something worse perhaps than being the vehicle for a publisher to make profit from – in the form of books sales?

I don't know the answer to that – and Martin doesn't claim to have the answer himself- although he offers some ways to bridge the commercial and the free. It is time we digital scholars got our heads around the economics of the digital field and stopped thinking our words of wisdom are being funded by the internet equivalent of the tooth fairy.



Martin Weller's book is available through [Amazon](#), or can be read online in open access form [here](#).

This post originally appeared on Gill Kirrup's blog, [Gynoid Times](#). Read the [original posting](#).

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