THE SEMANTIC WEB JOURNAL
– OPEN AND TRANSPARENT REVIEWING

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The journal

The journal

Semantic Web – Interoperability, Usability, Applicability

- international journal
- subscription-based
- open access available as option (author pays) both print and online

The journal

- only 1 year old
  - other major journals in the field from ca. 2005

- >90 submissions (plus >50 revisions)
  - 10 accepted (several under revision)

- average review turnaround time 65 days

The journal

- only 1 year old

- 50,000 hits on main web page
- top reviewed paper hits: 9 with >1,000

- 192 twitter followers

The journal

- first issue: invited EB member papers

- second issue (forthcoming)

  contains papers by
  very prominent contributors in the field

- 6 special issue calls posted recently

The review process

The review process

- submitted manuscripts made public
- solicited reviews as usual
  - review text made public
  - reviewer names public (reviewers can opt out)
- open reviews (signed!) possible by everyone
- comments (signed!) possible by everyone

- reviews hidden from web after ca. 8 weeks
- rejected papers also hidden after some time

Rationale

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I was disappointed about too many low-quality anonymous reviews

in a social environment in which it is often deemed inappropriate to complain to the editor (or to the PC chair) about such reviews.

Open & transparent: why?

why not?

why prefer an asymmetric system to a symmetric system?

why not?

- we gain accountability through transparency
  - transparent choice of reviewers and editors (acknowledged by name on published paper)
  - objectivity of decision process can be judged by everyone
    some authors publish their "reply to reviews" on the manuscript page (unasked)
  - reviewers /editors get some visibility and acknowledgement
  - effective avoidance of COIs

why not?

- there are studies which show that review quality is not affected by either procedure (?)
- reviewers should tend to be more careful and constructive, and less likely to show strong bias
- we stop the reviewer-guessing-game
- we can get authors and reviewers into a dialogue if this seems helpful
- good papers get immediate visibility (most paper pages have >500 views to date)

Lessons learned

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- The reviewing has been very smooth and very constructive so far.

- Most reviews are very substantial and constructive.

- We did not have any major controversies between reviewers and authors.

- We have observed major improvements of papers through revisions.

Lessons learned

- Non-standard process is additional work
  - monitoring of the process
  - repeated explanation of the process
    - to EB members
    - to reviewers
    - to authors
  - manual management of process (no ready-to-use tools)

Lessons learned

- open & transparent: opinions differ
    - very small fraction of reviewers wants to stay anonymous (approx. 5%)
    - only one person so far outright rejected reviewing for the journal because of our process
    - open reviewing is rare (approx. 5% of the papers)

    - some people participate in our journal mainly *because* of our process

Lessons learned

- open & transparent: opinions differ
  - a few colleagues report being a bit scared about their paper being publically dissected before being accepted for publication
  - reviews tend to be a bit too positive – it is even more important that editor/EiCs do not trust them blindly

  - we receive both substantial critique and cheerful encouragement about our process

My take

- If all journals had open & transparent reviewing …

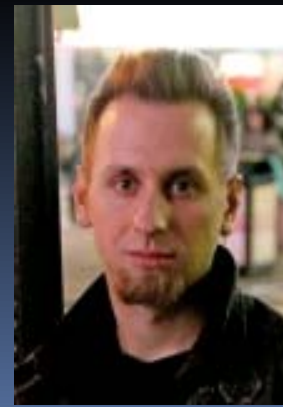 … then somebody should start running a journal with anonymous reviewing.

Thanks!

http://www.semantic-web-journal.net/

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