

Early Modern Literary Studies: Preparing for the Long Run

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Early Modern Literary Studies (EMLS)¹ is a peer-reviewed online journal publishing articles on all aspects of early modern literature. No registration or subscription is required, and it is available for free to anyone anywhere in the world with access to a web browser. All articles which are submitted to it undergo double-blind peer review, but those which are successful are usually published within less than a year of submission: a process much faster than comparable print journals. Since its foundation in 1994 EMLS has published over a hundred and fifty scholarly articles, and over two hundred and fifty reviews of books, films, plays, and multimedia products. In a typical week, its servers appear to record around 6,000 different readers in perhaps eighty different countries.

But although it is a veteran in terms of the internet, it is still a newcomer in a relatively slow-moving field where many of its rival print journals have pedigrees going back over a century. This paper reviews the progress of the journal since its foundation in 1995, and asks how a project like this one should be preparing for a long-term future.

The most obvious forms of this problem relate to questions of formatting and archiving. This paper will describe EMLS's involvement with different forms of archiving system including the National Library of Canada and the Stanford University LOCKSS project², a project to create multiple caches of the journal's contents at research libraries around the world. The paper will also review EMLS's policies around file formats, principally proprietary formats, HTML, and XML, and problems around revision policies.

But equally important to the journal's long-term future are the systems for determining its current success or otherwise. In particular, methods for determining the success of a commercial website typically include raw number of hits recorded; revenue generated through subscriptions and advertizing; and sales resulting directly or indirectly from the site. Methods for determining the success of an academic journal typically include print run; citation of articles in it elsewhere; and peer recognition among leading experts in the field. By which of these sets of standards should an academic website seek to measure its success? Or must a new set of standards be developed to describe this activity? This paper details the results of research

into EMLS's readership statistics (raw statistics online at <http://www.shu.ac.uk/emls/stats/>), addressing the question of what can and can't be deduced from them, before moving on to a consideration of other forms of esteem factor in terms of their effect in an institutional context.

If scholarly electronic publishing is to have a long-term future, it needs to be able to sustain publications over a scale of decades rather than merely years. This paper will conclude with recommendations for how to achieve longevity in an electronic publication.

1. <http://purl.oclc.org/emls/emlshome.html>
2. <http://lockss.stanford.edu/>

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