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**LINCEU EDITORIAL**

**DO YOU REALLY WANT TO START A NEW JOURNAL?**

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## **Do you really want to start a new journal?**

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### **Abstract**

Due to many reasons, especially in developing countries, institutions decide to run an online journal without the support of a Publisher. A group of volunteers – mostly science experts without publishing skills – is designated to establish all guidelines and search for papers to be available in a website. It does not take long to realize that this is not enough to create a journal. Lack of knowledge about what a journal's quality requirements are, might be the reason for its failure and the end of the journal before it reaches 2 years old. A case study performed at the Brazilian SciELO database shows that the path is very long and demanding and less than 3% of journals included in its collection reaches an initial degree on international quality in relatively short time.

**Keywords:** Scientific publishing; Indexing; Journal's quality.

### **Introduction**

Besides a real and strong motivation to start a new journal, institutions should know beforehand all the real dimensions of this hard task. It's common that institutions decide to create a new journal motivated by the need of fast delivering of its scientific outputs – results that would fit better in a thematic or institutional repository. A journal must be unique, recognized and geared towards publication of advances in its area. If the characteristics of the new periodical are banal, it will not be able to compete with the more structured ones. If someone believes that there is a gap in the publishing scenario that a new journal could fill, only then it's time to start considering the idea. Once it's decided, it's time to convince relevant researchers to join the editorial committee and, at the same moment, start to structure the online platform for manuscript submissions and begin to work on the international visibility to attract good authors. As good authors usually select recognized journals to publish their work, how could a young journal attract them? On the other hand, if the new journal doesn't attract good authors how will it become recognized? This paradoxical process could last decades and could be pointed as the main reason for journal's failure.

However, some journals break this paradigm and succeed in achieving recognition, gaining a good level of quality in approximately 10 years of existence. The purpose of this article is to identify which characteristics these journals and their editorial committees present to survive and to be recognized in a quite short period of time. The study was carried out only with Brazilian journals that publish online and are open access, having as reference the indexing in

the SciELO database, the most demanding one in Brazil, without the ambition of being extended to other scenarios.

### **Journal's design**

Once it has been decided the creation of the journal, it is necessary to define the title and its scope. This will be fundamental to get the attention of authors and bibliographic databases. Being a journal with a unique characteristic, at least locally, will help the indexing process, as the databases are interested in expanding their coverage. There are a lot of guidelines on the web that can be helpful in this initial task<sup>1,2</sup>.

The periodicity and punctuality in the publication are important factors to show the strength of the journal. The international trend is the continuous publication, in annual volumes that present the articles as soon as they are released from the process of evaluation and editorial production<sup>3</sup>.

The definition of the language of the publication is of utmost importance and all efforts must be made for publication in the English language, favoring the visibility, the recruitment of editorial committee members, especially reviewers, and attracting readers and authors from all over the world. Journals that opt for local language publication, often justified by the application of the search results, will face restrictions on indexing and internationalization.

### **Editorial Committee construction**

It is important, at this moment, to distinguish the editorial committee from the scientific committee according to the objectives of each one. The editorial committee is the broad structure and should contain the representatives of the institution that will support the journal along with the scientific committee and editorial production team<sup>4</sup>. The scientific committee is composed by the editor-in-chief, assistant editors and the section editors. There is no standard nomenclature for each role, but the responsibilities of each should be well defined. The workflow can be adapted to each journal in function of the demand of manuscripts received for evaluation and publication. The editor-in-chief may take part on the initial task of filtering the articles or may delegate it to the assistant editor, who must observe if the material is within the scope of the journal, complies with the submission rules and, mainly, does not contain plagiarized parts. Also, the editor-in-chief may assume the distribution of the manuscripts that go through the preliminary analysis to the *ad hoc* reviewers or leave it under the responsibility of the section editors who can give the final decision on the publication of the article or redirect it to the editor-in-chief. Regardless of the process, the editor-in-chief will be responsible for the

entire process<sup>5</sup>, including reports of misconduct, fraud, authorial disputes plagiarism among others.

The formation of the editorial committee should be treated with great attention, it is throw the excellence of the peer review process that the good results will come. The evaluation of manuscripts should be guided by the careful selection of articles that present a true contribution to the area of knowledge, otherwise they will not be cited, and the journal will not take off. It's important to invite to join the committee experts, from international institutions, who have commitment to this work, which most of the times is voluntarily, done in favor of the periodical and the science.

In addition to the management of the journal, the editor-in-chief needs to learn the technical, ethical, legal and specific aspects<sup>5</sup> of scientific publishing. Also, it's fundamental to keep the team in constant training, since every day tools and concepts to be assimilated arise.

### **Funding**

Unfortunately, journals that count on volunteers tend to weaken quickly. Good editors are usually researchers with many assignments and with little time to learn and devote to the journal. It is recommended to remunerate part of the team, especially the person in charge of the editorial flow, guaranteeing that the whole process will flow smoothly.

It's necessary also to hire specialized editorial services to produce the articles after its approval. In this scenario, the editor-in-chief is only responsible for setting the content to be published, leaving the operational work to the others – making primordial the need of a financial support. In the beginning is common that the entire support comes from the institution linked to the journal, however as the journal acquires visibility, recognition and indexation it will be able to compete for public funding. Another possibility, which will give sustainability to the journal, is the charge for a publication fee. However, the journal needs to be well consolidated to keep it as a choice for the authors.

### **Indexing**

After 2 years of uninterrupted publication it is time to search for indexation, quality seal that will feed the whole process, as it will give visibility and attract good authors. The editor-in-chief should check the most important bases for the area of the journal and learn about the criteria of each one<sup>6</sup>. Some bases require only formal aspects and it is easy to be included. Others will check criteria that will depend on the vision, planning and lot of efforts of the editor-in-chief.

Among the most difficult criteria to fill, for beginners, is the internationalization of the editorial committee, specially the *ad hoc* reviewers, and the metrics. Metrics will be also consequence of the quality of what is published. Only cited articles feed the metrics and to be cited, the article must bring real contribution to the science. Numerous metrics are available

and, although there is controversy, the most valued is the Impact Factor (IF). A journal receives IF after inclusion in the Journal of Citation Reports (JCR). The dissemination in the social media seems to be useful<sup>7</sup> and a creation of a journal's profile in Facebook, Twitter, Linked In, Academia.edu, Researcher Gate, among others, can help to disseminate journal's content and feed alternative metrics based on the number of accesses.

### Case study

In the world, Brazil is in 13<sup>th</sup> place in scientific articles production, most of them in open access. The data can be find in a report published by Science-Metrix<sup>8</sup>. The phenomenon is largely due to SciELO (Scientific Electronic Library Online), a database that brings together 283 Brazilian open access journals.

The SciELO database is considered the most challenging for admission in comparison to other Brazilians databases. The inclusion can be requested after 2 years of publication and the analysis is made considering a pool of criteria regarding the journal's format, the composition of an internationalized editorial committee, the importance of the journal in the area of knowledge and verification of citations according to known metrics<sup>2</sup>. Most of open access Brazilian journals included in the JCR<sup>9</sup> are also part of SciELO's collection. It seems that inclusion in SciELO's collection assures to the journal the potential and characteristics to compete with international journals in attracting good authors who may publish relevant articles.

Figure 1 shows the number of journals included in JCR and SciELO's collection, grouped by the time of existence. It is clear that less than 3% were included in SciELO's collection before the 13<sup>th</sup> published volume. On the other hand, to be included on JCR is more difficult. As shown in Fig. 1 shows, the time to be included in JCR is longer and just 30% of journals indexed in SciELO is included in JCR (data refers to January of 2018).

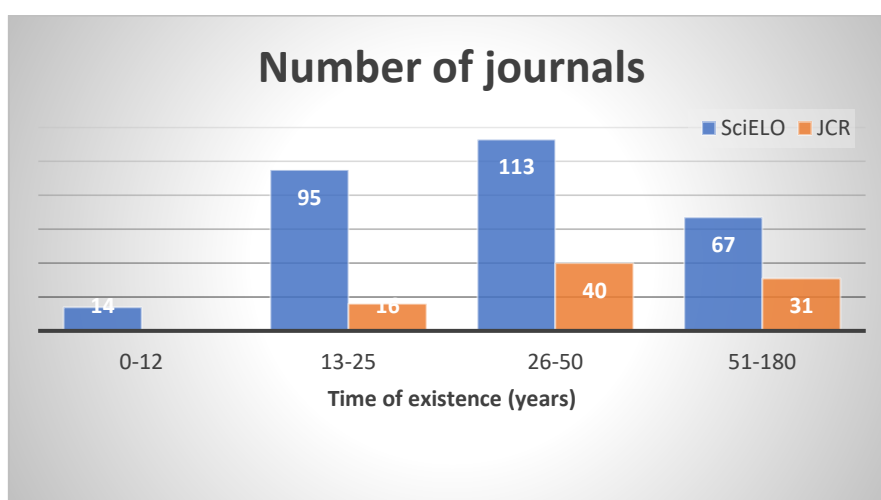


Figure 1. Number of journals indexed in JCR and SciELO's collection.

The group with the 14 earliest journals indexed in SciELO's collection is identified in Table 1 and a deeper analysis were performed aiming their management characterization.

Table 1 – Earliest indexed Brazilian journals in SciELO collection.

Journal Title	Volume (2017)
MedicalExpress	4
Revista Brasileira de Estudos da Presença	7
Sociologia & Antropologia	7
Revista Direito e Práxis	8
Journal of Aerospace Technology and Management	9
urbe. Revista Brasileira de Gestão Urbana	9
Machado de Assis em Linha	10
Revista IBRACON de Estruturas e Materiais	10
Brazilian Political Science Review	11
Dementia & Neuropsychologia	11
Revista Brasileira de Pesquisa em Turismo	11
Bakhtiniana: Revista de Estudos do Discurso	12
Boletim do Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi	12
Revista Ambiente & Água	12

Unfortunately, only 57% of editors-in-chief agreed in participating in a survey to investigate the structure of each editorial office. Although the results should not be considered conclusive, they helped to identify common factors presented by journals that had their quality recognized in short time since its creation.

About 72% of the journals are totally published in English language, 14% publishes in two languages (Portuguese and English) and 14% of them publish in Portuguese language. The editorial office contains from 2 to 6 professionals and part of them is not considered voluntary since it receives some remuneration. All these journals are financially supported by the institution and 80% of them are also granted by a Brazilian federal foundation. Only 10% charges authors for article processing, but no one charges for submission fee. None of them are hiring the services of a Publisher and 80% hires specialized publishing services for article production. All of them declared a unique characteristic – at least among Brazilian journals – and pointed as the main obstacles: attraction of good authors, lack of financial resources and need of English language publication. Although all journals are indexed in DOAJ (Directory of Open Access

Journals), none is included in JCR and only 10% are included in ESCI (Emerging Sources Citation Index) indicating that there is still a long way ahead to be considered internationally competitive.

### Concluding remarks

The list of the key elements for creating and managing a journal is quite long. People can deeply reflect and prepare themselves properly before starting a new journal. First, it's important to identify a unique niche and to have the engagement of a motivated team supported by the institution. Next step is about a medium-long strategic plan to get visibility to attract good authors that will publish articles with citation's potential, a requirement to be indexed in specific databases. During all the time the team must improve its editorial skills by continuous capacitation regarding ethics and other issues. The case study shows that only a few journals succeeded in the very first step toward recognition before 12 years of existence, proven by indexing in SciELO database, and even fewer are included on JCR.

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