

# **Evaluation of identified tracking software**

Based on: Specification for a tracking system

**28 January 2003**

This paper describes the search for available software for tracking of the review process of Collaborative Review Groups (CRGs). It also gives a brief description of the identified software in Appendices 2 and 3. The products have been evaluated against the specifications described in the document 'Specification for a tracking system' (now called simply 'the Specification') that was prepared for the ModMan Advisory Group, October 31 (2<sup>nd</sup> draft).

## **Document History**

2<sup>nd</sup> revision, 4 July 2002, Author(s): Gro Alice Sørensen and Shaun Treweek (first draft shared with the ModMan Advisory Group)

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## **Background**

The Specification is a proposal for a system to help CRGs keep track of their editorial processes involving reviews, individuals, series of events and the relations between them.

The Specification assumes an electronic system that communicates with a database, although this is not the only option. The choice of platform for the system, and if it should be a standalone or a web based application, were not part of the Specification.

## **Objective**

To identify available software, commercial or otherwise, which fulfils the Specification.

## **Search strategy**

Members of MAG suggested some of the software products presented in this paper. Other products were found by searching the Internet.

Sources: Google, Yahoo

Time of search: November, May and June

Search words: 'tracking', 'manuscript', 'document', 'system', 'review process', 'peer review', 'software'

## **Selection criteria**

Some important requirements were identified in the Specification. The system should fulfill at least the following:

1. Be simple to use
2. Minimize data entry and processing errors
3. Easily identify the status of a review in the editorial process
4. Easily identify the status of a person involved in the editorial process
5. Easily identify tasks which need to be carried out
6. Generate routine prompting when editorial action is required

## 7. Assist in carrying out repetitive tasks

### **Result**

We found that the search results could be divided into two main categories of software:

- Online publishing systems that also support tracking of the review process. A Web interface allows editors, reviewers, and authors to participate in the peer review cycle remotely and offers online manuscript submissions.
- Older client applications. Functionality varies and is limited.

The software identified by our search comprises 13 online systems and four client applications. We have only evaluated a number of these for pragmatic reasons, and chose the ones we found to be representative.

The online systems were expensive. For example, the online publishing system EJPress has a \$50,000 initial fee and costs \$8,000 per additional journal if hosted by the user (i.e. the Collaboration). Client-based applications were cheaper. Journal Administrator for example costs \$424 for a single journal. The suppliers of these products are currently uncertain as to whether the work of the review groups would be considered equivalent to that of a single journal or whether each review group would be classified as a single journal. The cost implications of the latter interpretation are substantial.

Most of the products meet the selection criteria in broad terms. The products evaluated are fairly simple to use and those that provide person, document and event databases do minimize data entry. They can identify the status of individuals and reviews and some of them provide guidance on tasks that should be performed and offer notification.

However, when these functions are compared to the Specification's list of questions that the system should be able to answer then it becomes clear that most of these special needs are not supported directly by any single product.

### **Discussion**

Most of the identified online products offer more, and different, functionality from that described in the Specification. These systems are expensive and

more complex than needed for the tracking of the review process in Collaborative Review Groups. The majority of these products are meant to handle publishing, with tracking being just one of many tools to support the primary publishing function. The purchase of one of these systems would involve paying for a good deal of redundant functionality. Most of these products will probably be able to produce the different reports described in the Specification but only after modification by the supplier. These modifications would involve additional and currently unknown costs.

The client applications we found were relatively easy to use and did to some extent also meet the needs described in the Specification. These products are more reasonable in price but do not offer the same flexibility. They do not, for example, offer many of the special listings and reports. It would probably be possible to configure these products to meet the Collaboration's special needs but some of these products are old and lack adequate support. These products would have to be modified and maintained by the Collaboration. Where support is available, modifications carried out by suppliers would attract additional costs.

The Specification was open with regard to budget and which types of solution are realistic for the Collaboration. Evaluating all the possibilities offered by a tracking product has proved to be a time consuming task. After a comprehensive evaluation of a limited number of products, we found that there were three possible ways of using available software:

1. Buy a product that fulfils most needs and pay for it to be reconfigured to meet the Specification in full.
2. Buy a product that fulfils some needs and then either pay the supplier to further develop the software or do this development within the Collaboration so as to meet the Specification in full.
3. Find a product that can meet some limited but immediate needs until a better solution is found or developed.

None of the products identified in this report can meet all the specified needs without reconfiguration or further development. Those offering most flexibility were expensive and in our opinion further evaluation of these products requires an estimate of the budget available for tracking software so as to avoid unnecessary work.

Further development of an existing product also has budget implications regardless of whether this development is done by the supplier or within the Collaboration. Evaluating a product as a candidate for further development requires a very thorough investigation and since it is not known at present whether the Collaboration is willing and able to adopt this approach, a comprehensive review of development potential has not been undertaken. Such an evaluation could be done should further development of an existing product be considered realistic and appropriate.

Some of the available client applications could be considered as potential temporary solutions, although it would possibly mean entering all data about each review once more. It is not clear at this time as to whether it is possible to import data from RevMan or ModMan into these products. A few of the questions asked in the Specification would be answered by direct use of one of these products, even though other immediate needs like some of the reports may not be met.

## **Our conclusion**

It is possible to find software that can carry out the functions listed in the Specification but this functionality will not be found in a single product.

Existing online tracking solutions are by-products of larger publication packages. A great deal of functionality would go unused with the purchase of such a system. Client-based solutions are cheaper but correspondingly more limited in function. There exists the potential for greatly increased costs for both types of product should suppliers define each CRG as a journal in its own right rather than as a contributor to a single, larger journal. Suppliers have so far been unable to clarify this point.

A budget framework for the tracking system is now required so as to avoid the unnecessary evaluation of products whose direct costs, or whose direct costs plus modification, would be beyond the Collaboration's resources.

## Appendix 1

### Evaluation of products against questions that the system should be able to answer

(Appendix 4 in the Specification, in rearranged order)

Explanation to symbols in table:

- \* The product does provide this information.
- ~ The information is not given in clear text, but it is given from context.
- ? Unable to decide whether the product can or cannot provide this information.
- 0** Not likely that the product can provide this information.

	EJPress	journalPro	Editorial Assistant	Journal Administrator
Number of reviews in the editorial process.	*	<b>0</b>	*	<b>0</b>
List of titles of reviews in the editorial process.	*	*	*	*
Number of updated reviews in last 120months/calendar year.	?	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
List of titles of updated reviews in last 120months/calendar year.	?	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
Number of reviews not updated within last 2 years.	?	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
List of titles of reviews not updated within last 2 years.	?	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
Number of reviews for which we have added a comcrit.	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
List of titles of reviews for which we have added a comcrit.	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
Number of titles registered reviews, with expired date review expected.	~	?	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
List of titles of titles registered reviews, with expired date review expected.	~	?	*	<b>0</b>
Number of reviews for which we have added a comment but have not had a response from the reviewer.	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
List of titles of reviews for which we have added a				

comment but have not had a response from the reviewer.	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b> <b>0</b>
Number of reviews assigned to a particular person?	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
List of titles of reviews assigned to a particular person?	*	*	*	*
Date last review assigned to a particular person	*	~	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
Number of reviews assigned to a particular individual in any one calendar year.	?	~	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
Number of reviews assigned to a particular person for whom we have not received the feedback by our deadline?	?	~	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
List of titles of reviews assigned to a particular person for which we have not received the feedback by our deadline?	?	*	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
Number of reviews assigned to a particular person for whom we have not had any feedback?	?	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
List of titles of reviews assigned to a particular person for which we have not had any feedback?	*	?	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
Number of reviews for which the reviewer has received all feedback but not returned final draft for final approval.	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
List of titles of reviews for which the reviewer has received all feedback but not returned final draft for final approval.	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

Table 1. Result of evaluation against questions the system should be able to answer

## Appendix 2

### Evaluated online systems

#### EJPress (US)

*Website:* <http://www.ejournalpress.com/>

*Price example:*

Standard pricing: \$5,000 initial fee per journal and \$30 per manuscript if they host the solution. Uncertain if each review group would be considered a journal.

They provide a site license fee structure: \$50,000 initial fee for the first journal and \$8,000 per each additional journal if you host it, both with an annual fee of 18%. (These fees do not include required third party software such as Oracle or MS0SQL Server, Windows 2000 or Unix, IIS or Apache, etc.) This provides us with source code access.

*Solution platform:*

Database: Sybase, Oracle, MS SQL0Server

Code: Perl

OS: Unix or NT

Both Mac and PC supported

*Description:*

The system is built with a role based security model, and supports multiple different types of workflows, which are configurable on a per journal basis and also per manuscript basis. Every time a task is completed the system records detailed tracking information. The author, staff, editor etc. can log into the system and retrieve detailed manuscript information. Email enabled alerts or reminders, including messages, can be configured to suit individual needs e.g. to chase updates.

*Evaluation:*

Lists all reviews in the editorial process sorted by where in the process they are. Red arrows point to action items pending in all stages of all manuscripts in the process. It is also possible to see all pending manuscripts listed with

details about author, reviewer, status and so on. Information about a person and associated tasks are available. Several reports are available and some would probably support some of the needs described in the specification.

User interface is a bit similar to Windows Explorer showing maps in a hierarchy with links to content. Easy to use.

### **journalPro (Finland)**

*Website:* <http://www.journalpro.com/>

*Price example:*

The price for a regular scientific journal that appears four times a year is \$789 purchasing price, \$493 annual license and \$98 annually for hosting.

If the review groups are comparable to journals, we would be talking about 50 products, in which case the price per product is lower: \$631 per product for purchasing and \$444 for license and hosting.

*Solution platform:*

Recommend use of MS Internet Explorer.

*Description:*

JournalPro is a web-based program that enables online submission of manuscripts, reviews and revisions. It supports the users during the whole peer review process from the original submission to the final decision. The author, referee and editor can log into the system and retrieve detailed document information.

*Evaluation:*

As an editor you can view all items in your editorial process, with their corresponding author, title and status. People are added easily and you can to some extent choose what information you would like to register about a person. When listing information about a person the review items associated with this person are also listed, together with information about status. Several email messages are provided, and you can alter the content yourself and send them from this system. Automatic notification can be provided.

Easy to use but does not support many of the reports or listings mentioned in the specification. The only statistics available are acceptance rate on different paper types with corresponding average processing time. No reports available.

## **Additional online systems**

### **PeerReviewAssistant**

*Website:* <http://www.dbpub.com/journal.html>

*Description:*

Manages submission and peer review of manuscripts.

*Evaluation:* None.

### **XpressTrack**

*Website:* <http://www.xpresstrack.com/editorial.cfm>

*Description:*

Manages manuscript submission, peer review, correspondence, tracking, task alerts, reporting, and billing.

*Evaluation:* None.

### **Temple Peer Review Manager**

*Website:* <http://peerreview.temple.edu/>

*Description:*

Manages peer review of articles submitted to scholarly journals or conferences. But the software is general, and also manages contract review, grant review, and similar activities centered on the submission and review of documents. The software can be customized to suit different kinds of reviewing processes.

*Evaluation:* None

## **ActiveText**

*Website:* <http://www.tso.co.uk/services/site.asp?FO=43016&DI=345074>

### *Description:*

ActiveText has been developed to enable organizations to output content to print, CD-ROM, web, WAP, PDF and other formats.

*Evaluation:* None

## **AllenTrack**

*Website:* <http://www.allentrack.net/>

### *Description:*

For tracking manuscripts and accompanying correspondence through all stages of submission, preparation, and publication. It will also convert files from the major word processing formats to any of the major web-viewable formats.

*Evaluation:* None

## **Editorial Manager**

*Website:* <http://www.editorialmanager.com/homepage/home.htm>

### *Description:*

Manages all aspects of the editorial process from submission to peer review and production. It converts from major word processing formats to PDF.

*Evaluation:* None

## **Rapid Review**

*Website:* <http://cjs.cadmus.com/rapidreview/index.html>

*Price example:* If 1,000 submissions per year:

Initial fee (one-time set0up) \$7,500

Hosting and software support (monthly fee) \$1,600/month

Meaning: \$26.700 first year, then \$19.200 every year

*Description:*

Manages the editorial process from submission, through peer review and task management, to online presentation. Will convert manuscripts to PDF.

*Evaluation:* None

## **ESPERE**

*Website:* <http://www.espere.org/>

*Description:*

ESPERE is both a consortium of academic publishers and a software package for managing journals. The software manages online submission and peer review.

ESPERE differs from most other such systems in that journals are not tied in to a particular manuscript tracking system. This allows journals to try the system without giving up their current tracking system, if they prefer it. It is also suited to smaller journals that cannot afford or need the bigger systems.

*Evaluation:* None

## **ScholarOne**

*Website:* [http://www.scholarone.com/home\\_flash.html](http://www.scholarone.com/home_flash.html)

*Description:*

Manages workflow and collaboration in the production of online journals and organization of conferences. It facilitates submission, peer review, tracking, acceptance, and publishing in print, online, and on CDROM.

*Evaluation:* None

## **BenchPress**

*Website:* <http://benchpress.highwire.org/>

*Description:*

Online manuscript management system including the facilitation of peer review, customizable for each journal. Will generate reports and statistics on the editorial process. Can prepare manuscripts for print or online publication.

## **Zope**

*Website:* <http://www.zope.org/>

An open source, object oriented web server and content management system. It's not specifically designed for journals but can be (and has been) used for journals.

## Appendix 3

### Evaluated client applications

#### Editorial Assistance (US)

*Website:* <http://www.ismi.net/easoft/eawin.html>

*Price example:*

EA is sold in two versions: a single user (\$995 US) and multi0user (\$1,995 US) edition. Both of them can be installed and run from a network, but only the multi-user version allows simultaneous access from more than one computer. Each of these licences includes the FoxFire! report generator, and approximately 50 prepared reports.

*Solution platform:* Windows

*Description:*

The Editorial Assistant for Windows (EAW) is a manuscript tracking that was originally written for Windows 95, and works on all versions of Windows (and mail merges with all versions of Word) since that time. It is a client application written in FoxPro.

*Evaluation:*

The user interface is very simple and rather easy to use.

One can add documents and people and assign people roles associated to documents. Listings of documents, people and roles are available in addition to the report function. One can search for overdue roles. Email messages are provided, and you can alter the content yourself but they cannot be sent from this system. Automatic notification is not available. The report function was not available for evaluation.

#### Journal Administrator 2000 (UK)

*Website:* <http://www.molentech.com/Journal.htm>

*Price example:*

The cost of a single journal version is \$999. This can be used

either on a single PC or installed on a network and accessed by up to five users concurrently. This is carriage free and the installation CD includes a PDF file for the 160 pages User Manual.

Email, fax and telephone support is included for three months after purchase. Optional support can then be obtained for \$169 per annum thereafter. This includes the supply of upgrades and enhancements when released.

*Solution platform:*

The Journal Administrator 2000 is Windows based and operates in the Microsoft Windows environment. This includes Windows 95 or Windows 98, Windows NT 4 and Windows 2000. It will not operate in the Windows 3.1 environment.

*Description:*

A Journal and Manuscript Tracking program that administers the production of Technical, Medical and other publications for Academic and Journal Publishers.

*Evaluation: (based on correspondence with Molen Technology and a user manual.)*

The software was originally designed for those involved in the production process rather than those responsible for the editorial process. There is a facility to enable the review process. This would need to be configured to replicate the way in which one manages the review process in The Cochrane Collaboration.

Details about journals, volumes, issues and manuscripts are central. Status reports on persons and manuscripts are provided. Links exist between this system and the Microsoft Office products Word, Excel and Outlook. Word is used to generate letters to contributors, and reports can be generated as excel files. Outlook is used when emails are sent directly from the system and items in this system can be added to the task folder of Outlook. The system can provide link to any MAPI compliant email client.

## **Additional client applications**

### **Journal Assistant**

*Website:* <http://www.journalassistant.com/>

*Description:*

Manages manuscripts, tracking, reports, peer review, and all related correspondence.

Locally installed. Do not have overseas support for the product at this time.

### **SwiftTrack**

*Website:* <http://www.swifttechsoftware.com/tracking.htm>

*Description:*

SwiftTrack for Manuscripts is document submission tracking software that runs with Windows 3.1x, 95 or later, or NT. Locally installed.