

Editorial Manager® Case Study

AGA Institute

How did AGA Institute handle peer review system migration?

For leading peer-reviewed scientific journals like *Gastroenterology* and *Clinical Gastroenterology and Hepatology* (CGH) processing new manuscripts quickly and efficiently is crucial to maintaining their edge and reputation.

There is much at stake. Published monthly since 1943, *Gastroenterology* is ranked first out of 47 gastroenterology and hepatology titles and is among the elite of biomedical journals. “*Gastroenterology* is the number one journal in the sub-specialty and among the top one percent of all biomedical journals,” says Erin Dubnansky, Director of Editorial Services at the AGA Institute.

In its pages, *Gastroenterology* delivers up-to-date, authoritative, clinically-oriented coverage of all areas in gastroenterology. Regular features include articles by leading authorities, reports on the latest treatments for diseases, and an exclusive correspondence section.

Though much younger, *Clinical Gastroenterology and Hepatology* has established itself as one of the leading journals for clinicians in the field over the past few years. “It is quickly becoming essential reading for practicing gastroenterologists,” says Dubnansky.

Both journals are published by Elsevier for the AGA Institute, one of two non-profit arms of the American Gastroenterological Association, the oldest medical-specialty society in the United States, founded in 1897.

The AGA’s 15,500 members include physicians and scientists who research, diagnose and treat disorders of the gastrointestinal tract and liver, and receive both monthly publications as part of their AGA membership.

Erin Dubnansky’s six-strong editorial team is responsible for *Gastroenterology* and CGH. She has spearheaded the move to Editorial Manager, Aries Systems’ web-based manuscript submission and peer review system for scholarly journals over the past 18 months.

Ready for a Change

The staff of *Gastroenterology* and CGH first introduced a rival software-based tracking system in 1999 but they grew increasingly frustrated with the system’s inflexibility, support costs and slowness.

“Turnaround time is very important,” explains Dubnansky. “Authors want a quick decision on whether we are going to publish.” She calls this ‘time to decision.’ Every month the editorial team receives approximately 250 manuscripts that must be processed and reviewed.

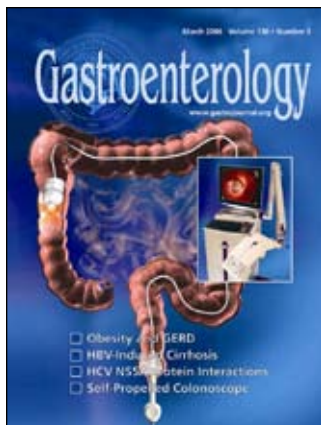
Like other peer review journals, manuscripts are submitted by leading scientists and practicing doctors from around the world for review by their peers in the hope that the journals will publish their work and that their contributions to medicine will be recognized.

If their manuscript is rejected, authors want to know quickly so that they can revise it or submit it elsewhere. If it is accepted, they want to be able to track its progress.

But this was not the only consideration. In addition, Dubnansky says the editorial staff were looking for a new system with better archiving and manuscript management features and one that would make it easier for authors and peer reviewers to access the system from anywhere across the globe.

This is important because the contributing authors, reviewers, and editors of the two AGA Institute journals are among the foremost experts in their field and work all over the world. *Gastroenterology*’s editorial board alone comprises experts from more than a dozen countries. A web-based system like Editorial Manager clearly addresses this issue, “It provides us with a much more structured and efficient process,” explains Dubnansky.

And because it is a web-based interactive system, it enables users to access it anywhere and at anytime.



The editorial team at *Gastroenterology* and *CGH* began seriously investigating new editorial systems when Elsevier acquired the journals a few years ago. But the team already knew it wanted to switch from its existing system.

“We looked at a number of systems,” says Dubnansky, but most did not fit the needs of *Gastroenterology* and *CGH*, were too expensive or lacked the flexibility and customization built into Editorial Manager.

The Decision and Transition Process

Dubnansky and her team began talking to Aries in April 2005. After talking to a wide range of vendors, they selected Editorial Manager at the end of June. The team spent the next six months implementing the switch before going live with EM in late 2005.

She began the switch to Editorial Manager by sending out what she calls ‘an email blast’ to all the users of the legacy system introducing them to the changes. “We also published announcements in the journals,” she said.

In fact, she says the only resistance to the change came from the journals’ boards of editors. To address their concerns, she worked with Aries to set up a web-based training course and held one-on-one training sessions with the editors to ensure that they were up to speed on the new system.

While not minimizing the effort that went into this transition, Dubnansky says the switch from the legacy publishing system to Editorial Manager went relatively smoothly. “There are a couple of minor things I would do differently, but with Editorial Manager you can change things ‘on the fly’ so we managed to work around problems we encountered.”

Indeed Dubnansky says the ability to easily customize the way Editorial Manager works was a key factor in the decision to choose the system over rivals. “The high level of configuration that was possible was very important to us,” she says.

Equally importantly she says, “Customer support was exceptional,” especially during the implementation phase when their Aries account manager was available to them every day and helped iron out problems.



‘You need to do your homework and not just rely on a demo,’ she says – ask for a trial site.

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After the Switch

So what are the main advantages of the switch to Editorial Manager? Dubnansky has a long list and at the top is the system’s reliability. “The Editorial Manager site rarely goes down,” she says.

But equally importantly, she says that Editorial Manager is much more intuitive in terms of the editorial workflow and interface with the back office production process. In particular, she says Editorial Manager makes it very easy for authors to upload their manuscript files and combine them into a single PDF electronic document.

That translates into a big speed advantage over paper-based systems or rival software packages. Using the new system has enabled the team at AGA Institute to cut even the time it takes to get a new paper processed and passed onto the journal’s editor-in-chief by one or two days.

Using the system, the editor-in-chief then assigns the paper to an assistant editor who decides whether it should be rejected or sent out for review – typically two peer reviewers selected from a panel of over 28,000.

Reviewers have two weeks to read and comment on the paper. These comments are then read by the assistant editor and discussed at a board of editors meeting.

Dubnansky says using Editorial Manager, it takes just 25 days on average from the submission of a manuscript to a decision being taken on publication – significantly faster than with the previous system.

Advice for Making the Transition

Now a year after implementing Editorial Manager, Dubnansky is clearly pleased with the results and she has some advice for others considering implementing a new installation or switching to Editorial Manager from an older system.

First, she says, plan the transition carefully and make sure you run your existing system and Editorial Manager side-by-side for a while. At *Gastroenterology* and *CGH* the editorial team ran the two systems in tandem for three months and put several hundred manuscripts through both to iron out problems before making the final switch.

She is particularly impressed with Aries' attention to detail and customer service which she says, 'can make all the difference.'

"You need to do your homework and not just rely on a demo," she says. Ideally Dubnansky suggests customers should ask potential suppliers to provide them with access to a trial site so they can run their own editorial process through the system and judge whether it is suitable for the task at hand.

Price is also a factor to consider – Dubnansky points out that the cheapest system is not necessarily the best. "We could have chosen from 10 or 12 systems," she says, including some that were cheaper.

Of course, migrating from an existing system to a new one is much easier if the original system vendor is accommodating, something that is by no means guaranteed. "We had to persuade our existing supplier to help us migrate data over to the new system," she says. Since then she notes, Aries has added data migration capabilities to Editorial Manager, "So this may not be an issue anymore."

She also says it is easy to underestimate the importance of training, particularly training existing staff that will have to adjust to a new system and says vendor support during this period is essential. Because the training process is so important, she suggests journals considering switching from an old to a new system allow five or six months to complete the transition.

While Dubnansky is pleased with the switch, there are a few small improvements she would like to see. For example, she would like to see the credit system operated by AGA Institute whereby reviewers receive continuing medical education credit certificates integrated into Editorial Manager. She would also like it to be easier to transfer data from journal to another.

But overall, she is a happy customer and particularly impressed with Aries' attention to detail and customer service which she says, "can make all the difference." Overall she says, the switch to Editorial Manager has been, "very positive."

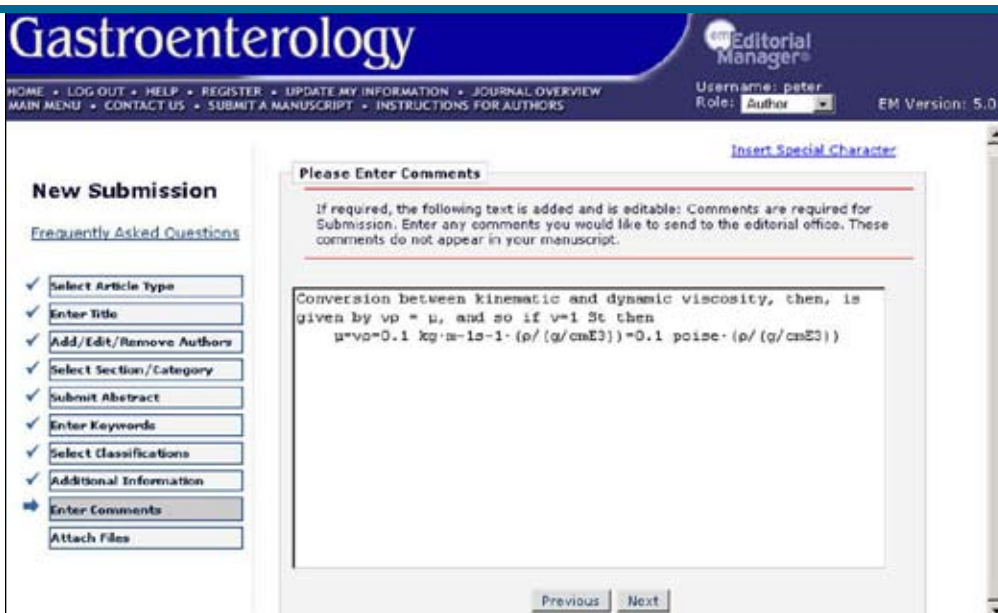
Having completed the transition to Editorial Manager, she says: "The most significant improvement is the faster turnaround time (for manuscripts) and the ease of use for authors."

Ultimately however, the move to Editorial Manager will help *Gastroenterology* and *CGH* remain competitive, and retain their position as two of the premier biomedical journals in the world. 

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AGA Institute's Online Submission Sites

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