

Description

What is a Service Charter?

In the commercial business world, a service charter is a public commitment on behalf of a business as to the level of service that their customers can expect. It is usually promoted aggressively on their website and other marketing collateral as a means of differentiation from their competitors.

Depending on the level of genuine commitment to the concept of providing the highest quality for their customers, some companies will offer vague promises to provide the “best service in the industry,” or “100% customer satisfaction,” but others will be more detailed in promising service or delivery within specific time frames, and some will go even further and put their money where their mouths are by offering refunds or credits if they fail to meet the benchmarks listed in their service charters.

A Competitive Environment

Service charters, when managed effectively, can be a fairly low-cost alternative to competing on price in a highly competitive marketplace. Provided you are able to back-up any and all promises made in a service charter, customers typically respond very positively, since most companies have a poor track record in following through on service commitments. However, is there any value for academic journals in considering service charters in their operations?

A Distorted Perspective

Academic journals chase [impact factor rankings](#) based on the number of citations for the articles and papers they publish. The more controversial or counterintuitive the articles, the happier those journal editors tend to be.

From their perspective, giving researchers the chance to get published in such prestigious journals is a valuable service to the academic community, since that citation will add value to their academic careers in the long-term, and their résumés in the short term.

However, does this really constitute “service” from the researchers’ perspective? Are there other areas where the “service” could improve? Consider how a commitment to greater *transparency* could improve a researcher’s customer experience with an academic journal:

- A clear commitment on how long it will take before you will get an answer on your submission, along with a straight answer on current acceptance rates.
- A clear commitment on how long it will take [from acceptance to publication](#).
- A profile of the expertise and experience of the [peer review](#) team. Integrity could be maintained with a stern warning that contacting any members of the team directly is forbidden and would result in an automatic rejection.
- If a submission is rejected, it is accompanied with detailed feedback and suggestions for an alternative venue.

These are reasonable expectations of good customer service, but they are currently beyond the realm of consideration by academic journals.

Distinctions Other Than Rank

The world of academic publishing is changing much faster than journal editors would like. Holding on to historical legacies and rankings will only work as long as citation volume continues to be the primary metric.

Article-level metrics (altmetrics) and continued exploration of social data will challenge the primacy of [citations](#) eventually, which will introduce the variable that journals have been able to avoid thus far—choice. When being published in a “cutting edge” online journal starts to carry more weight than an article in the historical leader in a particular niche, the rules of the game will change dramatically.

Category

1. Publishing Research
2. Selecting Journals

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