New Technologies for Editorial Offices: A Practical Guide

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The rapid rise of digitization has triggered unprecedented levels of change in many industries, and editing and proofreading are no exception. Indeed, ours is an industry with much to gain from combining the latest technology with trusted human expertise. In this article, we consider some of the key technologies gaining prominence in editorial offices around the world—including artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning—and examine how they can help editors and organizations provide fast, responsive services while ensuring exceptional levels of quality throughout the editing pipeline.

**Four Key Factors for Success in the Fit-for-Purpose Editorial Services Industry**

Digital disruption means that editorial departments face a high level of competition from both established companies and new market entrants armed with novel software technologies. Furthermore, authors can already add powerful apps and browser extensions to take the edge off their editing workloads.

How can editorial businesses ensure that they stand out in a crowded marketplace? According to industry experts, the following four interconnected factors are vital for success:

1. **Prompt delivery to market**

   Given the pace and disruption that characterizes this era of Industry 4.0, editorial businesses need to be equipped to deliver responsive, efficient services and meet client deadlines reliably. For breaking news, for example, the turnaround time before publication could be as short as 15 minutes.

   In such a competitive marketplace, clients have high expectations and zero qualms about switching providers if services are not delivered on time.

2. **All-in-one solutions**

   Today, clients are looking for a "one-stop shop" to meet all of their editorial needs in one complete service offering. Industry operators should therefore offer a comprehensive range of related products and services rather than focusing on one specific niche.

3. **Reputation, reputation, reputation**

   Having a good reputation is crucial if businesses are to attract new customers while retaining their existing clientele. This is especially true in an industry with high competition and in an age where users have the ability to publicly rate and review providers online and on social media.
4. Access to the latest technology

To stay ahead of the curve, editorial service providers must harness the latest and most efficient technologies available. As technological adoption continues to accelerate across the industry, operators are under pressure to stay up to date with new productivity software releases and improved document preparation techniques. In a saturated marketplace, doing so can be a significant competitive advantage.

Perhaps the most exciting technological advances in terms of productivity boosts are being made in the fields of AI and machine learning.

How AI and Machine Learning Boost Editorial Productivity

The core objective of AI implementation is to perform automated tasks and successively improve operations based on training using accumulated information.

A good example of AI in action is Google’s reCAPTCHA anti-spam technology. Regular internet users will be familiar with being asked to select boxes from a pictorial grid containing various everyday objects, from traffic lights to mountains. Overtly, doing so tells the technology that the user is human and not a bot trying to force spam messages through to the receiver. Covertly, Google is harnessing all this free user-generated information to train its own AI image-recognition technology, which becomes smarter (i.e., better at recognizing those traffic lights and mountains) as millions of inputs are completed every day.

In the editing world, advanced algorithms are trained using vast corpuses of text (totaling millions of words) that demonstrate correct language and grammar in action, meaning that these tools can attain a level of expertise, precision, and intuition that would take a human years to reach. In turn, documents can be rapidly screened for common grammatical errors, saving human editors time and freeing their own capacities for the more nuanced elements of their craft—from bolstering language and argumentation to making suggestions regarding logic and style.

As a result, editorial departments are turning to the widening technology landscape to source digital tools that can boost their efforts to guarantee high service levels for all—delivering high-quality documents at speed while maximizing editor productivity.

Some of the following popular external resources are used to support a range of everyday editorial tasks:

- Proofreading software: AI makes context-sensitive judgments to correct punctuation, spelling, formatting, and grammatical errors more quickly and consistently than human editors
- Plagiarism-checking software: AI compares new and existing content for similarities, helping editors and publishers determine whether the writing is original
- Fact-checking software: AI checks the veracity of claims against established factual evidence, helping editorial teams detect, understand, and respond to attempts at dis- or misinformation
• Reference-checking software: automates the process of formatting and correcting citations and references in academic documents
• Figure-formatting software: ensures tables and figures follow the desired academic style guide, saving time pre-publication

One example of these tools is Scribendi AI Grammar Check, an AI-based grammatical error correction (GEC) tool that offers suggestions to resolve issues pertaining to grammar, spelling, consistency, and dialect, all of which can be done before editors touch their keyboards. Once an assignment is in progress, editors can use Grammar Check flexibly and in line with their own preferred approach to streamline their editing work. Integrating such tools into an editor's workflow can significantly enhance editing speed, productivity, and quality.

Scribendi AI uses a deep learning methodology based on a large dataset of work—hundreds of thousands of orders—completed by Scribendi's human editors over more than two decades. In essence, the AI tool utilizes the vast historical memory of the Scribendi hive mind to predict the best improvements for a given text. Grammar Check offers a number of important functions that can be enabled or disabled by the editor, depending on the type of document involved.

In addition to in-process revision support, other AI tools also provide a final document check and validation. Even after an order is returned to the client, Scribendi's AI can help identify potential candidates for quality assessments (QAs). It even contributes to the QA itself, supporting the assessors to ensure a consistently exceptional level of service. Likewise, these tools can help process and evaluate applications from potential new editors.

In this way, it is not just at the text level that new technologies can help; editing companies are now able to accelerate their workflows and the entire editing pipeline from an operational perspective.

**How Editing Companies Are Harnessing Technology to Accelerate the Editing Pipeline**

In September 2020, Scribendi conducted an in-depth study to identify the major challenges faced by editorial companies in the context of handling academic papers. The top eight challenges uncovered were as follows in Figure 1.
Unsurprisingly, challenges related to quality and speed appear on this list, but we can also highlight operational efficiency—from managing editors to hitting deadlines—as a key difficulty.

In any industry, on-time delivery is essential for client satisfaction and retention, but it is especially critical when it comes to editing and proofreading. One key aspect of this is the efficient allocation and prioritization of assignments.

At Scribendi, clients submit a huge variety of orders through the company website, with documents varying in type, length, complexity, and urgency (since the turnaround time is determined by the client).

Figure 2 outlines Scribendi's editing and proofreading service processes and subsequent quality control measures.

When orders are received, AI technology helps determine the subjects of documents and prioritizes them accordingly. Scribendi's machine learning algorithms create prioritized pickup lists for orders based on the
following factors:

- Timeframe: editor deadline, client deadline, time since the order was placed, day of the week, and time of year
- Order features: document length and type (academic, business, personal, or creative), file type, quality of writing, and any potential formatting issues
- Pricing and payment: freelancer value and potential bonuses

The automated system is also capable of extracting keywords and summarizing documents, meaning that editors can quickly grasp the aims and content of the work. In turn, this order-queuing tool allows Scribendi to prioritize orders systematically, thereby optimizing workflow and reducing the number of missed deadlines.

The use of AI and machine learning is also spreading to other kinds of editorial offices, such as those specializing in journal publishing. In addition to automated in-text correction, journal editors can now use semantic search, automate plagiarism checking, and automate the verification of statistical results in research papers. As operations become more data-led, processing journal submissions, reviewing manuscripts in a subject- and style-specific manner, inviting peer reviewers, and managing production can move toward automation. In doing so, the human biases that tend to seep into certain areas of the editorial pipeline can be minimized. Ultimately, this will significantly reduce the time it takes for researchers to communicate their findings to the wider academic community.

As shown above, the potential of AI and machine learning in editorial services is increasing in line with the development of these new technologies. This is true not only at the individual word, phrase, or sentence levels of error correction but also throughout the entire editing pipeline. From testing and hiring new editors to allocating priority tasks and evaluating service quality, industry providers are increasingly able to confront their most pressing challenges with confidence and responsiveness.

*Scribendi is an ISO-certified editing and proofreading company with over 20 years of industry experience and a team of over 600 editors serving clients around the world. For more information, visit the Scribendi website.*

Credits:

Scribendi Inc., Editing and Proofreading Report (September 2020)

Jared Ristoff, Editorial Services in the US, IBISWorld (June 2021)


**Disclosure statement**

The author is the Product & Business Development Manager for Scribendi.