



SPIE Letters Virtual Journal

How can an optical engineer or scientist today keep up with the most important developments in his or her field? One new tool is the *SPIE Letters* virtual journal.

Optical engineering, as a field, has grown slowly, incrementally. That is, until the invention and development of the laser. At which point the field moved from early developments centered on the arrangement of lenses and sensors to the broad range of applications that have blossomed in the last 50 years. You need only examine the number and range of conferences that SPIE has introduced in this time to see this dramatic growth. And while the discoveries in optical engineering may not move with the speed and intensity of the latest biotechnology research, our colleagues produce breakthroughs in our field. These advances should be disclosed to other researchers as quickly as possible.

When I became editor of this journal, I considered the prospect of establishing a separate rapid publication counterpart to *Optical Engineering*. However, while serving on the SPIE Publications Committee I saw the considerable effort and time that was needed to start a new print publication. Instead, *Optical Engineering Letters* was created within this journal. We began accepting papers for the *OE Letters* section in August 2000; the first letter was published in February 2001. Twenty-five papers were published the first year. Since then the number of letters per

year has doubled, but the acceptance rate remains about 30%, indicating a high degree of selectivity by the reviewers and editors.

In addition to rapid publication at the front of each print issue with distinguishing page edges to set off the contributions, accepted papers were displayed online on the journal's web site on www.spie.org. This provided rapid access to their results prior to copyediting, typesetting, and printing the journal. Because the publication was on a public web site, it was the first time that papers published in an SPIE journal were available as open access documents.

More recently, with the introduction of the SPIE Digital Library, all journal articles are available online through SPIE membership and/or a Digital Library subscription. My editorials and all *Optical Engineering Letters* are now available as open access publications. Our sister publications, the *Journal of Electronic Imaging*, the *Journal of Biomedical Optics*, and the *Journal of Microlithography, Microfabrication, and Microsystems* (JM³), have also begun rapid communications sections.

With the establishment of these sections in each of the journals and because of our ability to present information on the web in a number of formats, SPIE is instituting a new way to discover and access the latest in peer-reviewed research in fields covered by our journals. This is accomplished by creating an online virtual journal, *SPIE Letters*, which displays on one web page a list of links to the latest letter publications from the four SPIE journals. Because all rapid publications are available through open access, *SPIE Letters* is an open access journal. The virtual journal can be accessed at <http://spie.org/spieletters/>.

One of the most popular events at some of the SPIE conferences these days is the Hot Topics session. In San Jose, the night before the Biomedical Optics Symposium begins, the room and halls are filled with researchers and students listening to some of the best people in the field filling them in on the latest developments. Consider *SPIE Letters* to be a digital version of Hot Topics for your field.

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Editor