



I am writing this editorial from the NEXT 2011 conference in Berlin, Germany (www.nextconf.eu). The conference has brought together a diverse mix of entrepreneurs, web activists, social marketers, web developers, scientists, engineers and journalists. The aim is to discuss the latest developments in technology that are changing the way that we handle and process data and the tools that we may be using in the years to come.

Two key topics have emerged from the presentations and discussions with other conference delegates about the future of data handling and dissemination. Firstly, that there has been a notable shift in the profile of the information gatekeepers: from being a select group of scientists, authors, journalists and editors to the new curators of knowledge: the crowd. The second hot topic has been the incredibly rapid development of new online social media tools. Services like Facebook and Twitter are extremely popular and are helping the new information gatekeepers to share knowledge. But there is room for improvement and innovation in these domains, to prevent important knowledge from being drowned out by the sheer volume of data created and acquired each day.

Astronomy communicators and educators encounter a similar problem: too much information to be communicated to the public. Large organisations, such as NASA, ESO, ESA and JAXA, have embraced the social media to reach out to new audiences. Meanwhile, citizen science projects have made scientific data accessible to the general public. But with an average of 36 scientific papers published each day on astro-ph in 2010, we have to develop new and innovative ways of steering the public through the huge amounts of new research.

Stepping away from questions about social media and technology for a moment, another topic that I feel deserves our attention is how outreach activities can be encouraged in the developing world. The International Astronomical Union, in collaboration with the South African National Research Foundation, has recently started implementing its decadal plan, called Astronomy for the Developing World. The plan builds on the success of the International Year of Astronomy 2009, and offers new challenges and opportunities for communicating astronomy across the globe, with an emphasis on the developing world.

In summary, I think the biggest challenges for astronomy communicators are to keep up with the fast pace of astronomy research and technology developments, and to reach beyond our ordinary audience. This year's Communicating Astronomy with the Public conference (CAP2011), which will be held in Beijing in October, will deal with all of these pressing issues. For more information, please visit the CAP2011 website: <http://www.communicatingastronomy.org/cap2011/>

I hope to see many of you in China later this year. In the meanwhile, happy reading!

Pedro Russo
Editor-in-Chief

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Cover: Stars over the South Tufa part of Mono Lake, USA, at the end of 2010. Credit: Grant Kaye