**THE FIRST WORD**

**NOVELTY, UTILITY, ... AND MORE**

*By Norman Chonacky*

*CiSE is a magazine, not a journal. I’ll give two examples of what I mean by the difference that I hope will help correct some common misunderstandings—both for those preparing manuscripts for publication and for those who volunteer to referee them. I trust that these characteristics are what you expect in CiSE, and I’d certainly like to hear from you if they aren’t.*

First, there’s the matter of balance between novelty and utility. A journal is committed to documenting new knowledge, the process by which the body of scientific and technological knowledge is validated and enlarged. With rare exceptions, the justification for a journal article is its novelty—if it’s obviously useful, so much the better, but this isn’t a requirement. The justification for a magazine article is its usefulness—if it’s novel, so much the better, but this isn’t a requirement. The balance between breadth and depth in a magazine article is an implication of these differences, and getting it right is crucial for CiSE because our reach is exceptionally broad and our readership is anxious to learn across disciplines. Producing an effective, high-quality article with useful content requires finesse in balancing these values, and everyone involved shares responsibility for success.

Second, a magazine ought to provoke new ideas in its readers rather than simply exposit its authors’ ideas. Readers assign a magazine secondary priority compared to reading the primary research journals in their areas of expertise. A successful magazine article must engage and interest our readers to a degree that journal articles just aren’t compelled to. Consequently, style becomes a critical element. This is why CiSE inserts a second—more stylistic—phase of editing, subsequent to an article’s acceptance on its technical merit. This is vastly different from journal manuscripts, for which style is an integral part of the technical content review.

Magazine style is quite different from journal style, so CiSE entrusts it to a set of skilled professional magazine editors in its production office. This separation of editing into content and style phases, each conducted by a different cadre of editors, can sometimes be a source of confusion or even frustration for the parties involved in the process. I believe these “afflictions” are more problematic for CiSE than computing magazines in general because so much more of our community is composed of research scientists and engineers, many of them in academic institutions and national laboratories, whose predominant publishing experience has been in technical journals.

Understanding this rationale of the magazine style model is essential for authors who haven’t yet encountered it if we are to minimize frustration in the editing process and maximize effectiveness in our articles. But it’s equally important for referees to understand that because we value their time, they’re responsible for content editing, including technical correctness and organization, rather than for punctuation, spelling, grammar, or overall house style.

Third, a magazine can be an advocate for practices and tools that the editors believe promote the professional interests of the fields we cover. Such advocacy is circumscribed by scientific integrity, which proscribes endorsing specific products or proprietary technologies, for example. On the other hand, this freedom goes beyond the obvious editorial commentary—clear opinion pieces—and extends to promoting professional discussions about areas and issues the editors think are important. We aim to educate our readership by proposing theme topics of our choice as well as by considering topics from others. We solicit articles from those we judge to be useful contributors to our topical priorities.

Let me close by offering an example of these considerations: the current issue. This collection of articles on multigrid computing has been skillfully organized following the principles I’ve outlined and, taken as a whole, I believe embody the balance of utility and breadth that we seek. You can judge for yourselves.