Andrew J. Hoffman (University of Michigan) tells us about a lively discussion in Anaheim. Practicioners, members of the media, and scholars discussed the problems and possibilities of publicizing and implementing academic research.

In Anaheim this year the OMT Practice committee created what was a lively, provocative discussion between senior editors and communications professionals on both the academic and general audiences. The PDW was called “Who are we reaching? The real and intended audiences for business school research” and was organized by myself and Pamela Worline. Our distinguished panelists included:

R. Duane Ireland, Editor, Academy of Management Journal

Ellen Peebles, Senior Editor, Harvard Business Review
Attended by nearly 100 people, the discussion explored why the mainstream news sources and practitioner journals of business neglect the research that emerges from the top academic journals of business research. We examined some of the underlying obstacles that block academic research from crossing into the major outlets of practice and the general questions of translation between academic and practitioner oriented sources.
Through the discussion, many themes emerged and so is hard to summarize. There were some messages, however, that emerged. On the question of relevance, the newspaper journalists were looking for material related to current issues (like the back dating scandal, CEO compensation etc), and the journal editors defined relevance on theoretical grounds. This brought up the tension over time frames. It is hard for an academic to have a scholarly paper come out in a time frame that will fit with the time scales of the news media. On the question of maximizing impact of scholarly work, one of the business school communications managers suggested that the business press may be becoming less important than in the past. With the emergence of web based media and the ability of schools to create their own web based content, the business media outlets may be becoming less relevant. Indeed, the newspaper journalists described a challenging situation in which news rooms are being cut radically, making it very hard to cover the news. But they stressed that they are very open to ideas or stories from academics. In fact, several of them said that it is often hard to find an academic who will talk to them, particularly when they are on deadline. So, there seems to be room for opportunity for those academics who may wish to engage the practitioner press more directly.