The year 2019 is an important one for the IEEE Robotics and Automation Society (RAS). Not only does the RAS turn 32 years old; the activities of our members during its early stages have led to a milestone anniversary: the 25th birthday of IEEE Robotics and Automation Magazine, the first issue of which was published in 1994.

Originally, the purpose of the magazine was to complement our prestigious IEEE Transactions on Robotics as a medium for creativity and real-world applications of the theories developed within or taken up by our Society. However, our magazine gained speed relatively quickly and soon became a visionary voice for our Society. Looking back to the themes of early issues, one finds forward-looking topics such as service robots (1994), medical robots and automation (1995), agricultural robotics (1996), underwater robots (1997), and rescue robotics (2002). In later years, IEEE Robotics and Automation Magazine has continued to focus on topics that are of significant relevance, including deep sea robotics (2010), robot ethics (2011), and drones (2012). It’s clear that the publication has always focused on timely and significant topics.

Key advantages of our magazine are its broad distribution, its attractive and award-winning layout, and the high quality of its content. This has made it enormously influential. Several special issues were so significant in their content that technical committees (TCs) were formed based on their success, such as the TCs on medical robotics, assistive robotics, and mechanisms. The magazine has also provided the seeds for entire journals, such as Soft Robotics and IEEE Transactions on Medical Robotics and Bionics. Thus, the magazine provides authors the opportunity to cover timely as well as risky topics and spur future research activities and initiatives.

The magazine’s articles are also highly cited. In particular, our tutorials, such as “Simultaneous Localization and Mapping (SLAM)” by Tim Bailey and Hugh Durrant-Whyte and “Multirotor Aerial Vehicles” by Robert Mahony, Vijay Kumar, and Peter Corke, have an enormous attraction. My personal experience with the magazine runs in the same direction. “The Dynamic Window Approach to Collision Avoidance,” coauthored with my colleagues Dieter Fox and Sebastian Thrun and published in the magazine in 1997, remains one of my most-cited papers. Moreover, the magazine consistently lands among the most highly ranked IEEE magazines.

The magazine also serves as a medium for news and outreach. IEEE Spectrum has picked up work published in the magazine, including “Ocean One: A Robotic Avatar for Oceanic Discovery,” from a research team lead by Oussama Khatib, thus making the Society’s work available to an audience going far beyond our Society.

Currently, the RAS is faced with a major challenge based on the European Union requirement that publications growing out of publicly funded projects need to be open source. This affects not only our journal and the letters but also the magazine, now financed by subscriptions and advertising. Meeting these open source requirements may necessitate a different model for the magazine, making it available not only to Society members but also to the public. This can be regarded as a chance for attracting more people to our field but also means that we must introduce additional elements that make Society membership attractive.

IEEE Robotics and Automation Magazine is clearly one of our Society’s success stories. Its 25th anniversary is a moment to thank all past editors as well as the present editor for their efforts to make this happen. Our Society is currently working hard to find ways to sustain this success for the future.