Editorial: digital trends

Jan Wright

As I write this in February of 2012, we have received the exciting news that the International Digital Publishing Forum (IDPF) Board unanimously approved the charter of the Indexes Working Group. Then, during a two-week voting period, the entire IDPF membership cast their votes, and the Working Group was approved by a vote of 69 for, 1 against, 1 abstain. This means that the Indexes Working Group will take on the challenge of writing ePub specifications for indexes so that they will become active parts of ebooks. An ePub 3.0-compliant ebook will declare that it has an index available in one or more formats, and will make navigation to the index much easier. Indeed, we hope that the index becomes one of the major navigational tools available for an ebook. When implemented by ereader manufacturers, an ePub 3.0 index will include exciting ways of viewing index data in an ebook:

- A traditional browsable back-of-the-book chapter view, with active hyperlinks and easy navigation, both to the index and within the index.
- A second pop-up view that will allow the reader to highlight a word or phrase, and have the index auto-scroll to that portion of the index. While in the pop-up view, the user can type new terms and look at those index sections, and snippets of contextual text surrounding the locators can be previewed.
- A third non-traditional contextual view of all the index markers in a portion of highlighted text, allowing the user to follow new paths to other index terms and to other portions of the book. We can expose index metadata for use by readers at the point of reading.

The approval of the charter is an exciting step forward toward the active inclusion and use of indexes in ebooks. The team had extremely thorough and detailed input from indexers, nonindexers, and international societies. The dreaded phrase 'Can't they just use Search?' was never heard. Please do check on the status of the initiative as it moves forward at http://bit.ly/uqKwD7

There are still two elephants in the room, and their names are Amazon and Apple iBooks Author. So we still have work to do, as the Kindle does not support ePub. Its newest format, Kindle8, needs to be studied, and indeed supports some ePub and HTML5 thinking. Apple made a huge announcement about its new authoring tool for the iBookstore. Its new tool has conflated the glossary with the index, and changed the textbook game. Nooks, Kobo, Google books, iBooks and many other readers support ePub, but we need Amazon's and Apple's ear so that we can talk about indexing that works on the screen and for the reader.

We are experiencing changes in publishing technologies on every front: how books are read, prepared for publication, sold, distributed, and marketed. How do we get index data created and available for all kinds of formats? We face a battle not only to meet our deadlines, but also to learn new technologies. We need to understand the level of technical expertise our clients have. They are having to learn new techniques at the same time we are, and are often not sure how to go forward. Discussing the hows and whys, and the eventual outputs they want to create, becomes crucial for indexers now. We all need to learn more about the technologies so that we can discuss project processes, know the implications of decisions, and understand the final displays of our indexes.

Paper now is just one more interface, and although it is the most free and luxurious in its display capabilities, we might need to index to a narrower, more stringent screen display. We may face limitations in numbers of subheadings, width of entries, numbers, symbol use, and coding of locators. We might need to change our phrasing styles and figure out how devices alphabetize and sort. 'Embedded,' 'unique IDs,' 'anchors,' 'dynamic indexing,' 'tagging,' 'XML,' 'DocBook,' 'HTML5,' 'Kindle 8 format' – all these terms could enter your life in the next email from a client. We have to be able to describe processes, workarounds, pros, and cons to clients. We have to think about the interface the index is appearing in, and write for that interface's strengths and weaknesses.

This issue of *The Indexer* is dedicated to technical aspects of indexing in many arenas. We have long been working with set pages, around changing pages, or without page boundaries, and Mary Coe and Bill Johncocks address the tyranny of the page. What happens to both reading and indexing when there is not a set page boundary? Does anyone miss it? Matt Moore gives us an overview of the semantic web and what it means to us in understandable terms. Nic Gibson and Michele Combs address XML in broad and specific terms, allowing us to understand the impact of XML processes in the publishing world. They give us a close-up view of XML indexing in practice.

Hand-held devices demolish the concept of a page, and rearrange our thinking about best ways to get a reader to a topic on a very small screen. Pilar Wyman discusses the development and implementation of indexes for medical works in hand-held format, and how they relate to printed edition indexes. Ceilyn Boyd and Mitch Wade take us on a fascinating journey into visualizing indexes as data, emphasizing relationships between topics and locations in a graphic format. Can we use some of these visualizations to show readers related topics and locations? Amazon has implemented one form of visualization: is it truly helpful, or not? I then take a closer look at the new Amazon X-Ray feature, which attempts to pull in index-like data, visualize its locations, and present Kindle readers with supplemental crowd-sourced information, with varying success. Is this better than an index? Can we convince people that it is not?

might be in a strong position to propose a solution to this problem by thinking creatively about the appearance of an index in text that has no pages (and, importantly, no page numbering).

The way forward for indexers

If indexers can offer XML-based services, publishers will use them. Learning enough XML to create an embedded XML index will be a prerequisite for joining the digital publishing revolution.

Learning XML is not hard for anyone who can think rigorously. Indexers are good at structure, and fundamentally, XML in publishing is about the imposition of structure on text. Publishers often believe that general text search will overcome the need for an index in digital publishing. This is not the case – and indexers should try to educate publishers to make sure they understand this. In the near future, many books will be published that will never appear in print. Many of those books will need to be indexed.

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The reviews section, not by accident, is oriented towards the indexer's digital world. And lastly, Pierke Bosschieter has pulled together have a lovely section filled with important links and working groups, to help expand your knowledge in all of these areas.

Our biggest challenge is to keep track of book publishing innovations, and quickly develop ways to incorporate indexes as important navigation and metadata in each innovation we see. We add value and metadata. The index can come along for the ride into every interface as long as we understand the technology used for presentation. We can let go of the page, and think of locators as just that: locators. We do not care if they are anchor points in HTML, unique ID strings in an InDesign file, or time codes in a video. The human analysis of the aboutness at that location is our unique contribution. The technology for presenting that location and accessing its content can change, but we are still the best resource for letting readers know whether a location is worth the visit, and where else they can look.

I urge you to find out for yourself how the current crop of ereaders display indexes. Find, buy, or borrow an ereader, whether it is a Kindle, Nook, Kobo, or iPad. Look at book indexes on the readers, such as Steve Jobs's biography, the SI publication *Indexing children's books*, the ASI publication *Marketing your indexing services*, Browne and Jermey's *Indexing companion* at `http://amzn.to/ynrn8Y`, or the OASIS Open Office Specification at `http://bit.ly/wcjsLg`. Each of these chapter-like indexes was developed in a different way, and each has differing success with access: links to the page, or to the paragraph. How should we use locators? What is the simplest path for the reader? Examine the interface your reader will be using to look at your index, and think about how to make it work better. Read the resource documents at `http://bit.ly/uqKwD7`. We illustrate ways forward in these documents, and indexers can use them in their discussions with clients.

Let's all take a look at what we want indexes to be, and throw out ideas about how to get there. It is still early in the game.

Jan Wright, guest editor