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Software for back-of-book indexing

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This workshop consisted of presentations of the three computer indexing programs by their promoters, Sky Index (Michael Wyatt), CINDEX (Frances Lennie) and Macrex (Max McMaster).

Michael began with a detailed examination of Sky Index, the most recently developed. He showed us Version 6, which is expected to be available later in the year at a cost of approximately \$A1000. Version 5.1 is the latest currently available, can be ordered online, and a free demonstration version downloaded. Sky is easy to use, can do most indexing tasks and handle most types of material. It has efficient data entry, as you can edit the records as you see them, and they are in the correct index order all the time. One part of the screen shows the alphabetical order and the other is the working area, with entries, up to 3 levels, in 3 columns, being added. Sky has an auto-complete feature, and will try to guess at a heading once a few letters are keyed in. (CINDEX also has this.) It will drag and drop a record (pick it up and move it somewhere else), mark and hide records if required, expand pagination or abbreviations, change cross-references to double-postings, and show the last index done. The main difference between Sky and CININDEX is the data entry/edit interface: Sky uses a spreadsheet-style grid, and CININDEX an index-card metaphor.

I have gone into a lot of detail about Sky, as the other two presenters compared their products to it, and showed the differences and similarities.

Frances spoke on CININDEX, the program her firm, Indexing Research created 15 years ago, which is now produced in several different editions (for Windows and Macintosh platforms) and costs about \$A1000. With CININDEX you can have more than one index on the screen at one time, and drag records or their elements from one to another, which is good for consistency, e.g. in journal indexing. You can file in chronological order, mark records new or altered in the current session, set the number of fields from 2 to 15, and search on keywords. CININDEX has the ability to flip records that Sky has, and uses brackets to affect sorting, if needed. While you're working, CININDEX won't automatically change any errors you introduce but will alert you to possible problems. It will also jump you to the point where you want to add an entry or let you see your most recently entered records in the order you enter them. Its spellcheck dictionaries can be customised to US or UK spelling, and it can produce camera-ready indexes, though the final index is usually emailed to clients.

Please note that the prices for Sky and CININDEX are only approximate, as they are set in US dollars, and the Australian price will vary as the value of the Australian dollar varies.

Max demonstrated the Macrex program, designed for a PC, but able to work on a Macintosh with Windows 95, 98 or 2000. It is a UK package, whereas Sky and CININDEX are US ones, currently up to Version 7, available at \$A725 to members of the Societies of Indexers and Editors, or at \$A250 if upgrading. Macrex is more primitive than either Sky or CININDEX because even though it operates through Windows, it still has the DOS-feel which reflects its origins. The other two were designed as full Windows versions. Although Macrex lacks some of the features of the other two, it has some which the others are only now trying to copy. With it you can select a term from the screen, add it to the bottom working area, and it will file correctly. It has flip functions, but not the preposition feature that Sky has, and its see also references are in a different colour. An introductory screen shows the major features, for instance a search and replace facility. You can do a combined author, title and subject index, separate this into three, identifying each element by code, and the program will drop them in their correct place as you add them. Layout and format can be varied, as well as methods of sorting.

All three programs are extremely useful for indexers, and as Frances Lennie said 'The program you choose depends on the way you prefer to work'.