



Australian Society of Indexers Newsletter

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Is there an easy way to embark on an indexing project?

Diane Jarvie describes the early steps in selecting, funding and planning a genealogy indexing project.

Is there an easy way to embark on an indexing project? If there is, I'd like someone to tell me about it!

It all started a few years back at my first meeting as a newly elected member of the Rockingham Branch (WAGS) Committee. I asked (innocently) "what local indexing projects are you involved in?" The silence was deafening. Over the next year or so I tried unsuccessfully to get the local Council involved in identifying a worthwhile project for us to tackle: I suggested building permits, dog licences, citizenship lists but none seemed to generate any enthusiasm and the idea died.

In 1997 Rockingham celebrated its centenary (100 years of local government) - what a good time to try out a local project. About a dozen of our members met to discuss what we could index. The Rockingham Rate Book indexing, started in 1991 before our Branch was formally constituted, was drawing to a conclusion, the result of extraordinary dedication of one man from the local historical society in conjunction with WAGS HQ who had financed the microfiche production. We considered extending the Rate Book indexing, but the Council's record management systems, storage facilities and logistics for gaining access to records were not conducive to group activity. We then discovered that Hans Stroet (the "loan indexer") had decided to extend his work for a further ten year rate period; this allowed us to give up the idea of the Rate Book continuation gracefully.

We turned to some of our other ideas: Rockingham primary school pupils (especially early schools), church records, teachers, sporting clubs, migrant arrivals, timber/trading shipping, a "Who's Who"

of the area. We decided on school records, but of course it wasn't that easy. We had to decide on the timeframe; were we to record information about schools, pupils, teachers or all of these; what "information" about the latter would we record; would Education Department authority be required; did any records exist, and if so, where were they held; what geographical area comprised "Rockingham" anyway. One of my most sobering discoveries, early in the planning of this project, was that schools, local

"One of my most sobering discoveries, ... was that schools, local authorities and government departments even with today's 'information boom' do not place a high priority on records management."

authorities and government departments even with today's "information boom" do not place a high priority on records management.

We decided to work within the timeframe 1830-1960. We chose to collect data about the schools, pupils and teachers and generally followed the format contained in an example of a school register we had found in the Battye Library (WA's historical library). We gained the support of the Education Department.

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Noticeboard

ACT Branch report

So far the ACT branch has had a pleasant and productive year. The Committee met and organised responsibilities and met again to work out a program for the rest of the year, including workshops and a mid-winter Xmas function. More serious discussion was held on a questionnaire prepared on the topic of education for indexing.

The General Meeting in March provided excellent food and workshopped the question of "What is Indexing?". Members separated into groups of specialist interest and discussed focus questions. The nine questions covered areas from considering functions of both the item and the providers; personal characteristics that might be needed; professional skills; types of indexing; levels of complexity and types of indexes.

A number of points came from every discussion group and more work in this area looks both promising and interesting.

After being told by the ACT Writers Centre that they often get requests for the names of indexers this Branch passed on a copy of the Indexers Available booklet. If other branches would like to do the same I would be happy to provide a list of Writers Centres, if needed.

The next Committee meeting will be held on 7 April 1998.

New Members

A warm welcome to the following new member:

Michael Harrington, ACT.

New on the website

See page 38.

UNSW Indexing courses

The School of Information, Library and Archive Studies at the University of NSW is developing two new one-day workshops on *Indexing Web Pages*, and *Indexing Images*.

The *Indexing Web Pages* course will run in late July or early August. It will examine the skills of subject analysis, evaluation and annotation and their application to Web pages. The concepts of metadata and subject gateways will be explored.

The *Indexing Images* course will cover description and subject analysis of photographs, film and video materials. No date has yet been set for the *Indexing Images* course.

Each course costs \$225.

Further information and bookings to Maureen Henninger, SILAS, UNSW, Sydney NSW 2052; phone (02) 9385 3589, fax (02) 9385 3430, email m.henninger@unsw.edu.au, URL: <http://www.silas.unsw.edu.au/silas/conted.htm>

Yellow Pages indexer category

The *Yellow Pages* phone book now caters for indexers with the following references:

INDEXING SERVICES — See
Publishing Support Services
Writers, Consultants, &/or Services.

I have an entry in the *Publishing Support Services* section of the Blue Mountains phone book under my name. So far this year I have had two phone calls requesting general publishing support, but nothing relevant. Perhaps an entry in the Sydney phone book with some qualifier showing that indexing is the specific support service offered would be more useful.

Apparently these references were introduced after requests instigated by Max McMaster, announced in the May 1996 newsletter. **G.B.**

Dates for your diary

Indexing Web pages course	July or Aug
Indexing images course	date not set
ACT Branch Committee meeting	7th April



Noticeboard

President's report Are We Professional Indexers?



Dear Colleague,
About the time you read this, I will be attending the conference of the societies of indexers in the United States and Canada, which is scheduled for Seattle on 13-16 May. One of my duties at the conference is to participate in an international

panel, where the four presidents will report on what is happening in each of the affiliated societies of indexers. Thinking about what I will say has focussed my mind on the state of indexing, as a profession, in Australia and New Zealand.

Much indexing is done by non-indexers—by editors, by technical writers, by librarians, by research staff, by internet access providers, and so on. Yet we persist in our belief that indexing is a profession in its own right, and not a sub-set of one these other occupations.

It is clear to me that our Society's most important activity at present is the research work being done by the ACT Region Branch, with the assistance of grants from national funds. The research projects aim to provide us with basic data to answer two separate but related questions:

- What skills, training, qualifications and background are needed in a good indexer? and,
- What opportunities for education and training in indexing are available to Australians?

The researchers have asked State Branches to get their members' opinions on the first question, and are conducting a comprehensive survey on the second. If you value the professionalism of indexing, I urge you to contribute your information and opinions on these issues.

If the Society is "to promote the training, continuing professional development, status and interest of indexers" (which is one of the objects in our constitution), then it is vitally important that we build on the results of the ACT research, and come up with a clear statement of the foundations of

From the editor

I HAVE BEEN CHANGING the style of the newsletter slightly each issue - I hope to now keep things pretty stable. As I use different software to Dwight I was not able to use his style sheet. I therefore used a Publisher 'Wizard' to create a style. I made some personal changes, and also got advice from a friend who is a graphic designer (just as there is much more to indexing than the general user knows, so there is a lot of expert knowledge involved in information presentation). Many thanks to Carole Best for all her help.

I have set aside pages 1 and 5 for the beginnings of major articles, pages 2 and 3 for announcements, AusSI official business, news, and the Editorial, pages towards the end for semi-regular columns (such as From the Literature and Practical Points), and page 9 for Online Observations (e.g. On the Web). The last page will contain contact details as usual.



AS I LEARN MORE ABOUT MS-Publisher I am also experimenting with various features - last newsletter I trialled pull-quotes, and this month we feature fancy first letters.

Glenda Browne.

indexing as a profession.

If we cannot point to a body of knowledge, and if we cannot identify a set of skills and expertise which are unique to indexing, then we cannot claim to be a profession. And if we are indeed a profession, then the professional Society must provide or approve opportunities for recognised professional education and accreditation. The ACT research will only be of value if we can use it as the basis of a clear formulation of the scope and nature of the profession of indexing. Only then can we expect our profession to be taken seriously, and to be more widely recognised, as a separate mystery (in the sense of a craft practised by the initiated) among the great and growing variety of information professions.

Alan Walker, President.

Is there an easy way? cont.

We discovered that records were certainly not complete and were not to be neatly found in one repository.

Surprisingly, one of the most difficult tasks was that of identifying exactly where and when schools had existed. We also had to establish the geographical boundaries. Rockingham, as we know it today - a City Council area with a population of 65,000, was not the centre of population in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was the surrounding farming and timber areas that attracted the people and thus the first schools. The early settlers were concentrated northeast of today's Rockingham in areas which now fall within the Shire of Kwinana. The Group Settlement Schemes of the 1920's took place in areas that are now on the rural edge of Rockingham or fall within the adjacent local government area of Serpentine-Jarrahdale.

We purchased maps of our proposed area of interest, which were laminated and mounted on board. We then enlisted the help of our local museum and historical society guru to identify as many of the old schools as she was able. We noted that the museum has a wealth of information about early settlers whose children would have been pupils in those tents, lean-to timber frames and corrugated iron structures that housed the early schools.

Of course we had to think about how, as a group, we could collect, collate and input our data. Not all of us are "computer literate" and in any event, we would have to spend many hours poring over documents that could neither be borrowed nor photocopied. Much of the information would be oral. We decided eventually, to use 150 x 100 mm index cards (6" x 4" in the old money!). We designed three different input cards: one for schools, one for pupils and another for teachers. Each card lists the fields of data to be documented, eg. pupil or teacher number, surname, given name, date of birth etc. for the people; construction materials, size etc. for the schools. On the cards' reverse an equal number of fields is available to reference where or from whom the information came. We realise a process of transferring data from an original source to a card and then finally into a database runs the risk of transcription errors, but how else can this much scattered data be collected?

"Assistance with the photocopying of this brochure was courtesy of yet another local politician who, on his days off, doubles as Leader of the Opposition!"

Finding funds for such a project is always a headache. We *delivered* (couldn't afford the postage) begging letters to eighty local businesses and community organisations in which we outlined the objectives, scope and processes of our project. Sadly we received acknowledgment from only ten percent - all of them a "thanks but no thanks" response. However, one of our local politicians has responded positively and donated \$50 to the cause.

We then successfully applied for a Community Arts Development grant from the Rockingham City Council that will help with our overheads. Of course we are obliged to comply with the conditions of the grant and so a separate accounting facility for the project is required (good thing our Treasurer is one of the indexing team). In my experience, people will give great amounts of time and energy to a project, but one can't expect them to be out of pocket financially as well. Our small grant of \$1,400 will be spent mainly on printing, postage, photocopy and travel expenses - so

guess what - we need to write guidelines for the claims and reimbursement of these items.

A "public appeal brochure" was produced with my desktop publishing software. The scanned photograph of a group of school children on the front cover was not of a local class (we feared copyright problems) but of my own school days c. 1947/48. Assistance with the photocopying of this brochure was courtesy of yet another local politician who, on his days off, doubles as Leader of the Opposition! These brochures were hand delivered to the public counters of libraries, medical practices, seniors clubs and homes for the elderly.

From a promotion perspective, our biggest break was the opportunity to include the brochure with invitations to a "Pioneer Luncheon" hosted by the Council at which over a hundred long-term Rockingham residents were present. Two of us were invited to the luncheon and I was even able to grab five minutes of programme time to talk about the project. The result of this exposure is a list of "old timers" prepared to help with information about schools in the district.

We are in the process of scheduling interviews with these sources and even THAT has raised some issues. We have decided to work in pairs; we'll need

(Continued on page 38)



Conference reports

Roxanne Missingham's paper on users' expectations is published below. Unfortunately her colour graphs could not be printed. For these, and other conference papers see the AusSI Web page at <http://www.zeta.org.au/~aussi/resources/conferencepapers.html>.

The Future of Indexing: what do users expect?

Indexing covers a complex range of professionals and tasks. Some of the categories within which indexing is a major task are:

- Management and retrieval of books, journals and other library material - Mostly undertaken by library staff.
- Management and retrieval of records - Mostly undertaken by records management staff and archivists.
- Management and retrieval of information about articles, conference papers and books (database) - Mostly undertaken by database indexers and library staff.
- Management and retrieval of web sites - Undertaken by a variety of Information Technology and Information Management staff.
- Management and retrieval of research data and business information - Managed by a wide range of internal specialists (Information Management, Library, Analysts) and increasingly outsourced.

To look further at client needs for indexes I surveyed students at the University of Canberra undertaking Information Retrieval, asking them how they located information on the World Wide Web.

"A very important question for the future of indexers is what will happen to improve the indexing of web information and how the skills of indexers can be recognised and utilised in this new medium."

Of the 32 students who responded, all had used Internet indexes (or search engines), many with less than optimal success because of differences in content, masses of "hits" and limitations in searching

After Internet Indexes the following (in order) were most heavily used to find information:

- Colleagues (equal 1st ranking).
- Pointers from other web sites (equal 1st ranking).
- Libraries and library staff (3rd ranking).
- Magazines (other than computer magazines).
- Listserv messages.
- Computer magazines.

When age is considered for the responses there seem to be variations for the groups 30-40 and 20-30. Individuals in the 20-30 year age group are the majority of the responses. They used colleagues and other people to a greater extent than other forms of information. The 30-40 year age group used libraries to a much greater degree than other age groups, and listservs, computer magazines and other magazines significantly less than the other age groups.

General comments indicated that there was much frustration from the very high retrieval rates, which resulted in some relevant material and much extraneous material and concern over the great variability in the results from difference search engines. They indicated awareness that time was a very limiting factor

in searching and concerns that they did not always find relevant information.

The following concerns were expressed in comments:

- Retrieves too much.
- Indexes vary.
- Too many false drops.
- Time consuming.
- Complex search strategies needed.

A very important question for the future of indexers is what will happen to improve the indexing of web information and how the skills of indexers can be recognised and utilised in this new medium. One significant development that is relevant is the

(Continued on page 36)

The Future of Indexing, cont

emergence of Metadata, or standards for data about data on Internet (primarily Web) sites.

What is metadata?

At its simplest metadata has 2 attributes:

- It is data about data (a record of attributes).
- It is also a pointer or indicator of the location of the data.

Lagoze¹:

- Content or data is a first class object.
- Metadata or data about data is a second class object.
- There is a linkage or relationship between metadata and data (even the catalogue can itself be a first class object).

Why is metadata important?

- Complexity of and need for improvements in Internet (primarily web) searching.
- Knowledge management issues.
- Emergence of information recording in museum industry emerging as a strong need.
- Emergence of technical standards which allow for rich encoding of information.

What do users want?

- Relevant material (not thousands of hits).
- Time saving indexes.
- Indexes which offer good complex searching.
- Reliability.
- Currency.

What are some of the emerging issues?

- Establishing technical standards (high participation by IT and Librarians).
- Establishing implementation packages/ protocols.
- Development of search engines which use Metadata (Resource Discovery issues).
- Organisational commitments to indexing their web data.
- Funding for professional indexing and development of professional skills in web indexing.

Some examples of metadata in action:

Green Pages: Environmental data directory
<http://www.environment.gov.au/net/edd.html>

Instructional Management Systems Project
<http://www.imsproject.org/metadata>

AusGILS (Australian Government Information Locator Service) - Under development

Now it's over to you!!!!

¹ Lagoze, C (1996) The Warwick Framework: A Container Architecture for Diverse Sets of Metadata, *D-Lib magazine July/August 1996* (<http://www.dlib.org/dlib/july96/lagoze/07lagoze.html>)

Roxanne Missingham is the Divisional Librarian at CSIRO Wildlife & Ecology

From Index-L

Roberta Horowitz reported that the Oct 97 issue of the *Bulletin of the American Society of Information Science* is all about **metadata**. It can be found at: <http://www.asis.org/Bulletin/Oct-97/index.html>

G.B.

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From the literature

NFAIS 40th anniversary

The March 1998 issue (Vol 40 No 3) of *NFAIS Newsletter* (National Federation of Abstracting and Indexing Services) is a special 40th anniversary issue, and contains thoughts on the past, present and future from the current and previous directors.

TONI CARBO, WHO WAS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR from 1974-1979 discusses three eras of information (originally identified by Vincent Giuliano). These were the discipline-based service, the mission-based service, the problem-based service (from the late 1960s). The eras had value systems and contexts which led to specific goals and objectives.

Ms Carbo believes that we are now in the fourth era, of "Just for You" services, individualised for each information user. Some Abstracting and Indexing (A&I) companies have developed customised products and offer packages with different databases, software, document backup and so on. Many of these newer packages are offered over the Internet.

Traditionally information such as that provided by A&I services flowed from producer to publisher to secondary services (A&I services) to online vendors to libraries to end users. Now through the Web individuals can explore this information themselves. However many of these individuals still need mediators with information skills to help manage, evaluate and use that information.

In this new era, issues of importance will include the growth of the World Wide Web, the impact of technology in information services and products, and the importance of mediacy (being an intermediate between end users and information).

THE LAST ARTICLE IN THIS ISSUE, BY CURRENT Executive Director Dick Kaser, was pessimistic. NFAIS and the organisations it serves (A&I services) have been through rounds of cost-cutting and downsizing in a troubled economy and industry in flux. Issues of importance include the use and reuse of electronic information.

He says: "Ours is an era of constant change, demanding us to be lean, nimble and quick on our

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feet. No sooner is one problem solved than it seems a new challenge comes knocking at the door. Yesterday's news is old fast. And yesterday's wisdom doesn't carry much weight."

Dick Kaser has identified the following as issues of the late 1990s:

- * New Management (changes in policies and staff; streamlining).
- * Content Management Issues - an emphasis on licensing databases, especially to individual library networks, rather than relying on copyright for protection against piracy.
- * Revolution in Distribution Technologies - use of the Internet to distribute database content straight to end users.

- * Primary/Secondary Issues - tensions between primary and secondary publishers developed as improved storage and access options from electronic distribution technologies brought new options to primary publishers.

However these two groups are now being brought together again by users' demands for links between secondary references and the primary literature.

- * Concepts - the neat chain of information from creator to user no longer exists and services are dealing with a 'new paradigm'. "Everyone in the chain diversified, took on others' roles, and started to vie with each other for limited markets."
- * Metadata - Mr Kaser believes that metadata will be the topic of the future, although it is not currently a big topic of discussion among NFAIS members.

Groups around the world are trying to find ways to organise and describe the information resources available on the Internet so they can be effectively and efficiently retrieved. NFAIS is co-sponsoring a symposium on metadata in biodiversity information management. "At stake here is the whole future of how information resources of various kinds will be effectively linked into the virtual digital libraries that visionaries imagine."

- * Fast times - NFAIS now has fewer, more focussed committees, and more work has fallen to NFAIS staff, as volunteers are too busy at work.

GB

Is there an easy way? cont.

to carry identification and a copy of the Education Department Authority; a receipts book (in case someone loans us a photograph or two) and a magnifying glass seemed a good idea for our "kit". We realise that some interview skills are called for: explaining what "indexing" means will be tricky, not to mention the reasons we do it! And how do you keep people focused and on the right track and at the same time not discourage the flow of potential information?

Along the way we have given some thought to the need for indexing guidelines: are there any, who has published such things? It was at this point that I discovered Dwight Walker, the Australian Society of Indexers and Judy Webster's Central Register. Dwight and Judy have been most helpful in providing contacts and suggesting texts and of course we have registered the project on the Central Register.

Well, we had the first meeting of the Indexing Group in May 1997, and as you can see, since then we have been really busy. The only trouble is,

WE HAVEN'T YET INDEXED ONE DAMN RECORD!

Diane Jarvie is the President of the Rockingham Branch of the Western Australian Genealogical Society Inc.

(Ed's note: I received Diane's article in January, so hopefully the project has progressed a bit further by now.)

WWWalker



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<http://www.wwwalker.com.au/>

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02-98960286 (T) * 02-97772058 (F) * 0412-405-727 (M)

Online observations

New on the Website

<http://www.zeta.org.au/~aussi>

For ease of access we will now be putting AusSI policy documents up on the Web (under Administration) as they are ratified. We also have a couple of alphabetical Indexes to the site itself, prepared by Dwight Walker's Web Indexing students and a Call for Papers for the August Indexer conference in Hobart (under Events).

I said that I would list the results of the hit counters placed on each entry point: this provides me and others with an indication of what areas of the site are getting attention. Note that each visit to a page triggers a 'hit', regardless of where the user comes from or how long they stay, so somebody going from the home page to the Admin section, then back to the home page on their way to the Events section, would generate two hits on the home page. I also generate about ten home page hits a week myself checking changes to the site. Keeping this in mind, the figures at 20th April are:

Home page: 289 hits since 31/3/98

Administration: 19 hits since 1/4/98

Membership: 22 hits since 31/3/98

Events: 37 hits since 31/3/98

Newsletter: 28 hits since 31/3/98

Prizes and Awards: 13 hits since 31/3/98

Indexing Software: 59 visits since 31/3/98

Web Indexing: 62 visits since 31/3/98

Indexing Resources: 45 visits since 31/3/98

We can infer that most people are entering through the home page and that most of them then go on to pursue software and other resources rather than looking for information about the Society. This raises the question: to what extent should we be acting as a gateway to other people's material, particularly if this duplicates other, similar collections of links elsewhere? Is it a task that can be passed on to a search engine, or does it make a genuine contribution to the Web? I'll be looking for some answers in the months to come - meanwhile, any suggestions will be appreciated.

Jonathan Jermev, Webmaster.



Online observations

From the Literature

Link Law

There's an increasing interest in indexing the World Wide Web, but it's worth keeping in mind the legal issues involved. In an article for the National Federation of Abstracting and Indexing Services Newsletter (February 1998: V40/2) David Mirchin of SilverPlatter raises some of these and discusses some past and pending legal decisions in this area.

The problem boils down to this: what is a Web page link? Is it an endorsement, a recommendation, a parasitic way to provide information without having to furnish it yourself? If the intention is to reap the benefits of other people's work - especially financial benefits - then the courts may take the same view of it that they do of an infringement of copyright. If, on the other hand, it's just a way of pointing your users on to "a really great collection of stuff" (or even "a really hilariously awful collection of stuff") then your link is legitimate: by putting a page on the World Wide Web and allowing free access, the people whose site you're linking to have set up shop, as it were, and opened the door: they can't debar you from sending on customers to them.

What if they don't allow free access? Some sites have set up a home page with a warning: "Don't link to this page!" Mirchin's opinion is that this isn't enough to override the assumption of free access. But if the site has passwords and other gatekeeper technology, then directing your users on to that site could be the equivalent of committing trespass.

Finally, what about liability for content? If my site directs a user to a collection of medical information, say, which is in error, and someone dies as a result, am I at fault? Mirchin recommends that you post a disclaimer: "These links are for information only, and do not constitute an endorsement or approval of the information linked to." Personally I wonder if that would stand up in a court of law. Any comments?

Jonathan Jerney, Webmaster

Link Law, cont.

[The Silver Platter disclaimer is found at <http://www.silverplatter.com/disclaimer.htm> and goes like this:

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From the Web

SA Editor's site

The South Australian Society of Editors now has a website at: <http://www.adelaide.net.au/~sosedssa>

Culture and libraries

The Australian cultural network (<http://www.acn.net.au>) is a site which aims to give one-stop access to Australia's cultural heritage online. (I searched for *index*, but found nothing about the art of indexing).

One of the key parts of the ACN is the Australian Libraries Gateway (<http://www.nla.gov.au/libraries>). The Gateway is a web-based directory service which gives access to information about Australian libraries. You can find details of local libraries, search their catalogues and so on.

The ALG is being developed by the National Library of Australia with funding from the Commonwealth Department of Communications and the Arts.

G.B.

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Copy should be sent to the editor by the last day of each month for publication in the middle of the next month. I would be delighted to receive contributions, both large and small, from members. Please contact me if you have any questions about suitable items for publication. The editor reserves the right to cut and edit material.

If greater than one A4 page, please send files on a disk or via email in one or two of Rich Text Format, Word for Windows, or plain text (ASCII).

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