

## Smart Search Engines and Smarter Searches

Jon Jermey

Just as competing corporations need to keep in touch with what their rivals are up to, so we as indexers need to keep in touch with developments in automatic information retrieval, if only to come up with convincing arguments as to why our way is better. This is particularly true now, in the age of the Internet, when previously obscure and recondite searching techniques have become an object of interest to anyone trying to locate material on the World Wide Web.

I want to look here at the techniques used by Web search engines, both 'traditional' and newer. I will also say a little about 'metasearches', which have nothing to do with metadata but are ways of calling on several different search engines at once, rather than individually.

In teaching Web users about searching techniques, I've found it useful for them to rank their Web queries on two scales: *obscurity* and *specificity*. The obscurity scale can be thought of as an attempt to answer the question: 'How many people world-wide would know the answer to this query?' A value of zero indicates that this is something that 'everybody' knows: a value of ten indicates that perhaps only five or so people world-wide would know the answer. The specificity scale indicates how long the answer is going to be; very general (non-specific) queries may take many pages to answer adequately; very specific queries can be answered in a word or two.

Obviously specific queries are easier to find answers to than general ones and obscure facts are harder to find than well-known ones. By classifying their queries on these two scales, the user not only gets an idea of whether an answer may be 'out there' somewhere, and how long it may take to find, but also an idea of which search engine to start with in order to have the best

chance of finding what they need quickly.

### Digests

For very general queries ('Describe some of the economic trends of the twentieth century'), I recommend *digests*. These are databases of Web site links which are put together and maintained by human beings: in other words to get into a digest, a site has to be inspected, reviewed, passed and (sometimes) rated on its value. The human classifier provides categories for each site, and these are in turn grouped into larger categories, giving a hierarchical structure. The best-known digests at the moment are maintained by Britannica and About; the first is more factual while the second is more topical and tends to focus on recreational material. Britannica has the added bonus that material from the Encyclopaedia is also available on the site. The drawback of digests is the same as their strength: because of the human involvement, the digest can only deal with a tiny fraction of the pages on the World Wide Web. Topics of broad general interest are covered at the expense of more obscure material.

As queries become more focussed and the desired responses more specific, other approaches become more useful. These include both *categorical* and *text-based* searches.

### Categorical searches

Up until a year or so ago there was a fairly clear distinction between these. *Categorical searches*, of which Yahoo is the prime example, allow the user to work down through a hierarchy of topics and subtopics until they arrive at an appropriate level of specificity. The user is then presented with a hit list of sites at that level which they can choose from. Thus, someone looking for information on the Australian Democrats in NSW might follow a hierarchy like:

Australia > Government >  
Political Parties > NSW >  
Australian Democrats

Like any good index, Yahoo has cross-references, so that someone coming in via

*Continued on page 4*

### What's inside

- 1 Smart Search Engines
- 2 Noticeboard
- 3 Dates for your Diary
- 3 From the Editor
- 5 Canberra Conference
- 6 The Price of Globalisation
- 7 Web Indexing Prize

# Noticeboard

## Notices of Annual General Meetings

### National and New South Wales

The Annual General Meeting of the Australian Society of Indexers will be held at 6.30 pm on Wednesday 21 March 2001.

The AGM will be held at the New Hong Kong Restaurant, 44 Macleay Street, Potts Point, NSW 2011, opposite the Landmark Parkroyal Hotel (ph 9356 8481).

Street parking can be difficult in this area. The Kings Cross parking station (Ward Avenue) and the Kings Cross railway station are both five minutes' walk from the restaurant. The 311 bus stops at the front door.

The Annual General Meeting of the New South Wales Branch of the Society will also be held during this meeting. The AGMs will be followed by a Chinese banquet, at the subsidised cost of \$25.00 per person, drinks included.

RSVP: Alan Walker by 15 March 2001  
ph: (02) 9368 0174, fax: (02) 9358 5593  
email: vicepres@aussi.org

An election nomination form can be found on the back page.

### Victoria

The Annual General Meeting of the Victorian Branch will be held at Graduate House, 224 Leicester Street, Carlton on Tuesday, 27 February 2001.

Parking is available in Grattan Street or in the University Carparks — cost \$2 only.

Drinks and nibbles at 7 pm prior to dinner at 7.30 pm.

Cost including wines, soft drinks and coffee, with a two-course meal (vegetarian meals on request) is \$25 for members, \$30 visitors and friends.

Dress is smart casual.

During the evening there will be a brief AGM, and the announcement of the Society's Indexing Awards.

Our guest speaker for this occasion will be Mr Michael Webster, lecturer in the School of Applied Communications — RMIT, Graduate Certificate in Publishing. He is also Chairperson at CAL (Copyright Australia Ltd), and is involved with BookTrack (UK) and the Australian Publishers Association.

RSVP by 20 February 2001 to Jenny Restarick: (03) 9545 2178 (bh); ph/fax (03) 9528 2539 (home); email: jenny.restarick@enquiries.csiro.au.

Nomination forms for positions of Vic Branch committee available from the above contact points.

### ACT Region

Fancy an AGM and Dinner in Vienna?

Then join us on Monday, 26 February 2001 at the Vienna Restaurant, Chifley Shops, Eggleston Crescent, Chifley.

Time: 7.00pm for 7.30pm start

Cost: \$25.00 per person, includes meal of pre-dinner nibbles, schnitzel, salad, strudel and coffee. Drinks are extra (restaurant is byo, \$1.00 corkage, soft drinks available for purchase).

Spouses, partners and friends welcome!

The highlight of the evening will be a panel presentation of key features of the forthcoming joint editors and indexers conference, 'Partnerships in Knowledge'.

Panelists will include members of the Canberra Society of Editors.

For further information, contact: Shirley Campbell ph (02) 6285 1006 (home) or email: shirley.campbell@alianet.alia.org.au or Penny Whitten ph (02) 6241 4289 (home) or email: pwhitten@interact.net.au

RSVP with payment by 19 February 2001 to the Australian Society of Indexers (ACT Region Branch), PO Box 2069, Canberra 2601.

### AODC 2001

HyperWrite Pty Ltd is pleased to present AODC 2001 — the Fourth Annual Australian Online Documentation Conference. AODC 2001 will be held from 28 to 30 March 2001, at Rydges Lakeside Hotel in Canberra.

The Conference this year features a collection of expert speakers from around the world, including Andrea Ames from the STC (USA), Charles McCathieNeville from the World Wide Web Consortium, Chris Higgs from the HTML Writers Guild, Joe Welinske from WinWriters (USA), Matthew Ellison from Digitext (UK), and more. AODC 2001 will also witness the first official public disclosure of Microsoft Help 2.0 outside the US.

AODC 2001 offers an unrivalled opportunity to learn more about online documentation, help system

*Continued on next page*



# Dates for your Diary

- Feb 22** AusSI Newsletter deadline for the March issue
- Feb 26** ACT Region Annual General Meeting
- Feb 27** Victorian Annual General Meeting
- Feb 28** Australian Society of Technical Communicators (NSW)  
Jonathan Jermy speaks on 'Indexing'  
Rugby Club, Rugby Place (off 31a Pitt Street),  
Circular Quay, Sydney  
6.00 pm
- Mar 6** Society of Editors (NSW) AGM  
**Note** new meeting address:  
Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts  
280 Pitt Street (between Park & Bathurst Streets), Sydney  
6.30 for 7.00 pm
- Mar 21** National & New South Wales Branch Annual General Meeting
- Apr 20-22 & 23**  
AusSI & Canberra Society of Editors' 'Partnerships in Knowledge' conference & workshops
- Jun 29-Jul 1 Sheffield (UK)**  
Society of Indexers (UK)  
Conference 2001 'Indexing at the Cutting Edge'

## From the Editor

Thank you to Glenda Browne for her warm welcome to me as editor; co-editor really, as Michael Wyatt is doing the layout and design for the newsletter.

We decided to change the look slightly, just to have some fun, and we hope you like it, but other than that, I can't do any better than follow Glenda's lead.

In this issue we have some guidelines from Jon Jermy on search engines, Michael Wyatt's scrutiny of the new ISO Standard for Indexing from an Australian point of view, and the announcement of the Web Indexing Prize.

Our next issue will be a special edition devoted to the Canberra Conference in April, hosted by the ACT Branch of AusSI and the Canberra Society of Editors.

I repeat Glenda's invitation to members to send in comments, quarrels and contributions. We have brought forward the deadline to the week before the end of the month to allow time for layout. That is Wednesday 21 February for the March issue. I look forward to hearing from you all.

Cheers,

Frances Paterson

### Noticeboard

*Continued from previous page*

development, hypertext techniques, and emerging technologies. The conference is aimed at writers – people developing online content such as writing manuals, procedures, help, quality management systems, Intranet content, or public Web documents.

Full details, including registration information, can be found at <http://conference.hyperwrite.com.au/>

### Newsletter via the Web

If you have indicated that you wish to receive the Newsletter via the World Wide Web rather than by Australia Post, you will no longer be notified directly by email. Instead, a notice will appear on the Society's official Internet mailing list,

ALIIndexers, as well as on Index-L. For details on how to join these lists, go to <http://www.aussi.org> and select 'Mailing lists'.

### New members

A warm welcome to the following new members:

- ☐ Ms Beverley Hesilton, Vic
- ☐ Mr William Carter, Vic

### Queensland volunteer required

The National Committee of the Australian Society of Indexers would be grateful for an offer from a helpful volunteer who is willing to act as a contact person between Queensland members and the National Committee. There are no duties other than receiving information and keeping other branches informed of Queensland activities.

Philosophy > Political Philosophy > Social Democrat parties > Australia should find a cross-reference link to take them to the Australian Democrats page. Despite this, one major problem with Yahoo is that, like any hierarchical system, the use of categories is inconsistent and sometimes appears arbitrary. Without a good knowledge of the system (and even with one!) the user can spend a lot of time simply trying to identify the category in which to search. Another problem is that Yahoo, although it contains much more than the digests, still only covers a tiny fraction of the material on the Web. Because of this, searches for more obscure and/or more specific material are better done with a text-based search engine.

## Text-based searches

Text-based searches are purely automatic, and run without any human intervention. Because of this they can cover a much larger proportion of Web sites – 20% of the Web or more. All text-based search engines start with 'brute force' searching: that is, they sift through the text of millions of Web pages looking for a word or phrase and make a Yes/No decision: if a page contains the word or phrase, it is a 'hit'; if not, it is a 'miss'. The differences between them arise after this stage, when they are deciding what to do with their 'hits'.

## 'Dumb' text searches

'Dumb' text searches – exemplified by Altavista and Lycos, among many others – rank their hits on the basis of how the word or phrase appears on the page. If the search is for 'Indian runner ducks' for instance, pages with 'Indian runner ducks' in the title will take precedence over those where 'Indian runner ducks' is a major heading: these in turn will take precedence over those where the phrase appears as ordinary text. Pages where the phrase appears several times take precedence over those where it appears once (but pages that deliberately 'flood' the search engine with hundreds of repeats are excluded), and pages with the phrase near the top take precedence over those where it appears further down.

The results are often unsatisfactory, with hundreds or thousands of barely relevant pages appearing in the hit list and no quick way to identify the relevant ones. Also clouding the issue is a tendency for some search engines to give higher rankings to sites maintained by their sponsors, or to screen out or downgrade competitors' sites. (One recent response to this is for text-based searches to try and cover their bases by providing a categorical search as an alternative, so that users can try whichever strategy seems to give the best results.)

## 'Smart' searches

'Smart' searches take a more intelligent approach to ranking their hit lists. Google, for instance, keeps track of how many other sites link to the sites in their hit list, and ranks the hits accordingly: a site about Indian runner ducks which has fifty other sites linked to it will rank higher than a site which only has ten. DirectHit takes a different approach: it records which of the hits it displays are actually selected by its users: the hits that are selected most often make their way up to the top of the list for the next searchers. Although the techniques are quite different, they produce startlingly similar results: a Google search will usually share at least half of its top ten hits with a DirectHit search. In most cases either of these will give users much quicker access to what they want than a 'dumb' search.

However, because 'smart' searches rely on some feedback from what other people are doing, they become less useful in searching for the very obscure and very particular. And in those situations where the user is hard pressed to find any reference to their topic at all, questions of ranking become meaningless. Here at the 'sharp end' of searching, is where metasearches come into play.

## Metasearches

A *metasearch* is a kind of 'broadcaster' that packages up a single query and passes it along to many different search engines, both text-based and categorical. Because each search engine has a different coverage, the chances of finding a hit are increased. The better metasearches rank the results, eliminate redundant hits and sometimes provide extra services like spelling checks. If you're in the (relatively unusual) situation of finding too few hits instead of too many, metasearches are for you.

An awareness of the relative strengths and weaknesses of search engines can be an enormous aid to searching. It can also give the user a solid appreciation of the benefits of human analysis and human indexing!

## References

Britannica: <http://www.britannica.com>

About: <http://www.about.com>

Yahoo: <http://www.yahoo.com> (global) and <http://www.yahoo.com.au> (Aust/NZ version)

AltaVista: <http://www.altavista.com>

Lycos: <http://www.lycos.com>

Google: <http://www.google.com>

DirectHit: <http://www.directhit.com>

## Australian BOOKSELLER & PUBLISHER magazine

### Attention freelancers!

Advertise your services in the 'freelancers' directory' in the May issue of *Australian Bookseller & Publisher*.

AB&P is the only journal for the Australian book industry. Advertising in this special feature will enable you to:

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email [rina.afflitto@thorpe.com.au](mailto:rina.afflitto@thorpe.com.au).

# Canberra Conference 'Partnerships in Knowledge'

The Australian Society of Indexers, ACT Region Branch and the Canberra Society of Editors will be jointly sponsoring a national conference of the two societies in April 2001. The Conference will be held at Rydges, Canberra, on London Circuit in the City Centre from 20-23 April 2001.

## Conference Outline

**Friday, 20 April 'Issues day'**

**Focus on Relationships and Working Together**

- ☐ Editors and indexers in knowledge partnerships
- ☐ Relations with clients
- ☐ Partnerships with other professionals
- ☐ Standards and ethics

**Saturday, 21 April**

**Focus on Business and Technology**

- ☐ Business planning
- ☐ Business issues: quoting, taxation, contracts and insurance
- ☐ Professional survival
- ☐ Impact of new technology on indexers and editors

**Sunday, 22 April**

**Focus on Education**

- ☐ Education and training
- ☐ Accreditation, registration, professional development
- ☐ Marketing, public awareness
- ☐ Also, the new style manual and proofreading

**Monday, 23 April**

**Workshops**

The Monday workshops will be fee paying workshops open to all, focusing on the practical aspects of editing and indexing. Conference participants will receive a discount on attendance.

## Conference information

For more information about the program and workshops ring Lynn Farkas (02) 6286 4818, email [lfarkas@pcug.org.au](mailto:lfarkas@pcug.org.au), or Louise Forster at [www.wordsworth.com.au](http://www.wordsworth.com.au), or write to Partnerships in Knowledge Conference Committee, GPO Box 1115, Dickson ACT 2602, Australia.

By now, all Society members should have received a registration brochure for the conference. If you have not, please contact the Conference Committee.

There is also a special brochure for those interested in sponsoring the conference or exhibiting in the trade fair. To obtain a copy, email Louise Forster or write to the Conference Committee.

## Conference costs and bookings

- ☐ Full conference: non-members \$360; members \$295
- ☐ Single day: non-members \$140; members \$115
- ☐ Workshops (various lengths, etc.): conference participants \$35 for 2 hour; \$50 for 4 hour; \$75 for computer workshops
- ☐ Workshop costs, non-conference participants (i.e. only attending workshops, off the street so to speak): \$75 for 2 hour; \$120 for 4 hour. Computer workshops not open to nonparticipants.

Please book early because strong interest is anticipated.

Accommodation at Rydges Lakeside: standard room (for two people) \$147/day; buffet breakfast \$15 per day. These are special rates, much cheaper than normal.

## Special Conference issue of the Newsletter

Details of the Canberra conference are in the registration brochure. Our March issue will feature information about papers, workshops, guest speakers, associated activities, plus registration details, and so on.

Meantime, we know that overseas participants include representatives from the American, British, and Canadian societies. We hope also to get representatives from the South African and Chinese societies.



# The Price of Globalisation: a Personal Reaction to AS/NZS 999:1999

Michael Wyatt, Keyword Editorial Services

**A**fter a lengthy gestation period, *Information and documentation – Guidelines for the content, organization and presentation of indexes* (AS/NZS 999) was finally delivered towards the end of 1999. Being simply the International Standard ISO 999 rebadged as an Australian/New Zealand Standard, it is identical in all respects to the International Standard.

This article is not a review; ISO 999 has probably been reviewed elsewhere (although I have not seen anything), and I leave it to others to review the Standard from an Australian and/or New Zealand viewpoint.

Is an international standard, which necessarily attempts to cover all countries and cultures, appropriate for use as a national standard? I understand that with all ISO standards, the ISO member countries have the option of adopting them in total, or rejecting them, but not of amending them for local use.

## Australianness

'Australianness' has been an issue since Flinders suggested the name for a new country. In what way does the new Australian standard fit with our concept of 'Australianness'?

The first thing that strikes me about the Standard is that it flouts Australian conventions in spelling, capitalisation and usage. The very title on the cover uses foreign spelling – 'organization' – and non-standard capitalisation – all words apart from the first and fourth (why the fourth?) have lower-case initials.

Now, although it is true that '-ize' and '-ization' are used in Australia and are recognised by our national dictionaries as 'correct' alternatives, I cannot find it used in any major newspapers, popular magazines, or books published by a major Australian publisher.

And although the *AGPS Style Manual for Authors, Editors and Printers* (the default Australian standard) permits both 'maximal' and 'minimal' capitalisation, an examination of books published by major Australian publishers (the majority of the clients of a large number of us), shows an unvarying use of the 'maximal' form. This unorthodox (in Australian terms) spelling and capitalisation persists throughout the text and its examples.

The Standard uses double quotation marks (" ") throughout. The *AGPS Style Manual* specifies single quotation marks in all Commonwealth government publications. Some Australian publishing companies do use double marks, but the overwhelming majority use single marks. Indeed, one of the tasks of the desk editor in preparing a US or British book for an Australian edition is often to convert double quotes to single, as it is to convert '-ize' to '-ise'.

Hyphenation of compound words, such as 'proof-reading' for 'proofreading', often does not follow majority Australian usage.

Of course, all of the usages described above are permissible Australian variants, but the cumulative effect of so many 'minority' usages is one of foreignness, or at least of un-Australianness.

Obviously, there are recommendations in the Standard that I myself would never follow, but I think we would all have personal disagreements with certain individual recommendations of any standard.

## Examples

Examples are provided not only in English, but also in French and German, even Icelandic and Dutch. Certain provisions specifically cover French and German usage. This is particularly unhelpful in an Australian Standard: the more than 100 community languages officially in use in New South Wales, for example, do not include French and German, much less Icelandic. There are no examples in Aboriginal languages or in Maori.

In all examples, the numbers in page spans are separated by a hyphen. It is Australian convention to use en rules to separate page spans (AGPS 6.101). Since it is also standard British usage (Butcher) and American usage (*Chicago Manual of Style*), how did the hyphen

creep into the standard? Does the ISO have its own peculiar standards?

Moreover, 'numbers [in page spans] should not be elided, because maximum clarity is achieved by presenting first and last numerals in full' (Clause 7.4.3.1). Says who? This is typical of a number of assertions that appear to me to be contrary to common sense yet are not backed up. This one is certainly contrary to Australian usage. It does allow 'exceptionally' for numbers to be 'elided so that only the changed digits of the second locator are given' (the system described in *Hart's Rules*). The *AGPS Style Manual* uses this style in its examples, although it offers no prescription. Looking at indexes in recent Australian publications I find that both these systems are used, but it appears to me that transcribing the final two digits (as prescribed in the *Chicago Manual of Style*) is used slightly more than either of them.

"See also" cross-references should normally follow the locator(s) relating to the heading ... from which they refer' (Clause 7.5.2). The examples all show the cross-references following on from the heading on the same line, instead of set out as a subheading. Although all examples are stated to be 'illustrative and not prescriptive', it would be more helpful if they illustrated Australian convention.

## Local standards

Many government contracts specify that Australian standards must be followed throughout a project. It can be difficult to reconcile this Standard with other de facto but more widely used standards such as the *AGPS Style Manual*.

None of the above is intended to detract from the usefulness or importance of this Standard. Clearly, indexers and their clients are at liberty to accept or reject individual clauses – we're not talking about the installation of electrical wiring systems or foundations for apartment blocks. The existence of a set of indexing standards can only im-

*Continued on page 9*

# Report on the AusSI Web Indexing Prize 2000

Jonathan Jermey, Judge

**F**ive entries were received for the 2000 Web Indexing Prize. I examined these with the assistance of Madeleine Davis, NSW Branch President, and found that of these five, two were not indexes and one contravened the guidelines, leaving two entrants and one clear winner. It is clear that Web indexers have yet to learn all the lessons painfully acquired over the years by book indexers. Three of the entries are discussed below. For space reasons, the remaining two have been held over for the March issue of the newsletter.

## Prize winner

### Site Index: a Subject Guide to the Queensland Environmental Protection Agency

<http://www.env.qld.gov.au/environment/misc/siteindex>

**Submitted by: Patricia Kennedy, Librarian (Electronic Publishing), Public Affairs Division**

The QEPV index is a good, workman-like approach to providing access to many topics scattered across hundreds of pages. Each letter is given its own Web page and there are subheadings and a few double entries (but not cross-references). It accomplishes the requirements of what, in my view, a good Web index should do: it could appear at the back of a book without causing the publisher any embarrassment; it puts technology to work in a way that enhances the usefulness of the index; and, finally, it enables the user to retrace their steps in a more detailed and informative way rather than simply through the use of the Back button.

There is still lots of room for minor improvements. The site uses frames and the top part of the frame is large and fairly intrusive. I didn't see any way to turn it off or get to a frame-free version. There are no 'go to top' buttons or links back to the index home page. Link colours are a bit dramatic and could be toned down. Initial capitals are used throughout. Occasional lapses of organisation are evident – under Mammals, for instance, where the sole subheadings are 'nocturnal' and 'search'. (What is a search mammal? Is it a bloodhound?) Scientific names are

given after the common name, but don't appear in the index in their own right. Links from 'Save the Bilby' and 'Bilby' take the user to different pages, although the two pages do then interlink. There could be many more double entries: 'Environment Education Centres' could be indexed under 'Education'. Individual National Parks are not listed by name. The link 'See also publications' would be more useful if it took you to publications starting with the same letter as the index page you are on. And access to the index from the QEPV Home Page could be a bit more obvious rather than going through 'Search'.

However, taken all in all, and considering the usefulness of this index as a search tool for the site's target audience, this was the clear winner of the AusSI Web Indexing Prize 2000. A book voucher for \$100 from the Co-op Bookshop will be sent to Patricia Kennedy.

## Other entries

### Quaker Index

<http://www.geocities.com/michaeladamr/quakerindex5.htm>

**Submitted by: Michael Adam Reale**

This is an index of the World Wide Web on the topic of Quakers, Quakerism or The Religious Society of Friends.

I know nothing about Quakerism, on or off the Web, so I am in no position to judge whether or not Michael's links are comprehensive. There are about 300 of them here, connected to Quaker-related sites around the world, from 'Aotearoa Yearly Meeting' through 'Friendly Woman' (a maga-

zine?), 'Politicians and where they rest' (not 'where they lie', for obvious reasons), to 'Young Friends'. The text is a little small and the layout could be tidier, but there are big letter headings to help locate where you are. Italics are used for the titles of publications, but I couldn't fathom the reasons behind the occasional use of bold – and there was no introduction to tell me. Colours are appropriately plain, but the page would benefit from a change in the link colour to something that contrasts a little less dramatically with the background.

Although this is set out like a 'traditional' back-of-book index, there are many problems and inconsistencies, for example:

- 'Another Journal of John Woodman' appears under 'Another' and 'Journal' but not 'Woodman'
- 'Articles on Prayer Teams by Stan Perisho' is indexed under 'Articles' but not 'Prayers' or 'Perisho'
- 'Biography of William Penn' appears under 'Biography' but not 'Penn'
- 'William Penn' appears as an uninverted heading but the Biography is not listed here either.
- 'Fox, George' appears inverted but with a cross-reference to 'Journal of George Fox' that leads nowhere.
- The subheadings listed under 'articles' and 'books' omit articles and books mentioned elsewhere in the index.

In fact there are no cross-references and no double posting that I could find.

### Australian Pictorial Thesaurus

<http://www.pictureaustralia.gov.au>

**Submitted by: State Library of New South Wales**

This is part of a large integrated system, obviously representing many person-years of work, whereby images (mainly photos) from Australian sources can be made available over the Web through a keyword search system.

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The photos are assigned keywords, which are in turn taken from a thesaurus, the creation of which itself is a considerable achievement.

I had serious reservations when I took over the Web Indexing Prize about our competence to judge information retrieval sites, and these have surfaced here with a vengeance. To begin with, I'm not sure what has actually been submitted: is it the picture retrieval system itself, the keywords associated with the pictures, or the thesaurus behind the keywords? If it's the picture retrieval system, then it's obviously orders of magnitude larger than any other entrant and far more sophisticated in its design and operation. It gets users to images quickly; and in general to the right images, although the ambiguities of image indexing pre-

clude complete accuracy all the time. But *is it an index?* Isn't it rather a search engine?

Well then, what about the assignment of keywords to pictures? Competent professionals have done this with diligence and skill. The keywords are made visible when the user accesses the picture and in general I had no criticism of the words chosen (or the ones omitted). Indexing has been done, certainly – but where is the index? If I am to judge an index I must have something in front of me to judge, and a vast collection of distributed keywords isn't something I can reasonably compare with the other entrants in the competition.

What about the thesaurus itself? Is a thesaurus an index? Well, yes, in a sense. The entries are words, the locators are terms used in place of those words. There can be subheadings 'see under' and related term 'see also'. A

thesaurus is an index to some portion of the English language. But is it an index to material on the Web? We're going to take refuge behind the Guidelines again and say that the thesaurus as such doesn't 'provide users with direct access to online material', and as such is ineligible.

Finally, there is no obvious sequence or subdivision to the results of the search. If I search for, e.g. 'Aborigines', I find a jumble of photos, drawings, cartoons and sketches in no discernible order. Attempts to try and establish whether this was meant to be in geographical, alphabetical, chronological or some other meaningful sequence were fruitless. If, as I suspect, it's in order of storage location on the Web, then the user has a right to know this.

So perhaps it's a good thing that this is not an index, as if it was, the sequencing of material would leave something to be desired.

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prove the standard of indexing and the status of indexers.

But would it have been more helpful to have a standard that focused on and

reflected Australian and New Zealand practices? Without a doubt. Would it have been worth the trouble of rejecting the ISO standard and constructing a standard specifically for Australian and New Zealand conditions? I doubt it. Had we been permitted to tinker

with the ISO standard to bring it more into line with local practice it probably would have been worth the relatively small amount of work. But such is the price of globalisation – or do I mean globalization?

## B.O.O.K.

**Introducing the new Bio-Optic Organized Knowledge device, trade-named BOOK**

*This piece appeared on the Internet, where it was unsigned. Thanks to John Simkin for sending it in.*

BOOK is a revolutionary breakthrough in technology: no wires, no electric circuits, no batteries, nothing to be connected or switched on.

It's so easy to use, even a child can operate it. Compact and portable, it can be used anywhere — even sitting in an armchair by the fire — yet it is powerful enough to hold as much information as a CD-ROM disc.

*Here's how it works:*

BOOK is constructed of sequentially numbered sheets of paper (recyclable), each capable of holding thousands of bits of information. The pages are locked together with a custom-fit device called a binder which keeps the sheets in their correct sequence. Opaque Paper Technology (OPT) allows manufacturers to use both sides of the sheet, doubling the information density and cutting costs.

Experts are divided on the prospects for further increases in information density; for now, BOOKs with more information simply use more pages. Each sheet is scanned optically, registering information directly into your brain. A flick of the finger takes you to the next sheet.

BOOK may be taken up at any time and used merely by opening it.

BOOK never crashes or requires rebooting, although like other display devices, it can become unusable if dropped overboard. The 'browse' feature allows you to move instantly to any sheet, and move forward or backward as you wish. Many come with an 'index' feature, which pin-points the exact location of any selected information for instant retrieval.

An optional 'BOOKmark' accessory allows you to open BOOK to the exact place you left it in a previous session — even if the BOOK has been closed. BOOKmarks fit universal design standards; thus, a single BOOKmark can be used in BOOKs by various manufacturers. Conversely, numerous BOOK markers can be used in a single BOOK if the user wants to store numerous views at once. The number is limited only by the number of pages in the BOOK.

You can also make personal notes next to BOOK text entries with an optional programming tool, Portable Erasable Nib Cryptic Intercommunication Language Stylus (PENCILS).

Portable, durable, and affordable, BOOK is being hailed as a precursor of a new entertainment wave. Also, BOOK's appeal seems so certain that thousands of content creators have committed to the platform and investors are reportedly flocking. Look for a flood of new titles soon.

## 'Stylewise'

The lead article of the latest edition of *Stylewise*, a newsletter issued by AusInfo, is headed 'In the Back'. Written by AusSI member Barbara Malpass, it explains why people avoid books that lack indexes. Some quotes:

- 'Do people really discard books without an index? Well, yes, they do.'
- 'For a purchasing officer ... no index may mean no order.'
- '... a book without an index [is like] a museum or gallery without labels or signs. It is very interesting but the user cannot learn anything from the visit without some additional information.'
- 'The Australian Society of Authors recommends that authors not index their own work. Their reason is that one of the indexer's duties is to stand in for the user ...'
- '... however beautiful the book may be as an object, it will receive little attention if extracting information from it means heavy digging.'

It finishes with a plug for the AusSI Website.

# Elections

## Nomination Form

We, the undersigned members of the Australian Society of Indexers, nominate the person named for the office indicated for the year following the Annual General Meeting for 2001.

Name of person nominated:

### National Committee

- ☐ President
- ☐ Vice-President
- ☐ Honorary Secretary
- ☐ Honorary Treasurer
- ☐ Committee Member

### New South Wales Branch

- ☐ President
- ☐ Vice-President
- ☐ Honorary Secretary
- ☐ Honorary Treasurer
- ☐ Committee Member

Signature of nominator:

Signature of seconder:

Signature of nominee:

Nominations must reach the following address by 28 February 2001:

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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. We are delighted to receive contributions, both large and small, from members. Please contact us 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 Rich Text Format, Word for Windows, or plain text (ASCII).

### Graphics

Image files can be accepted in most common formats. Do not embed images in text files. If possible, submit line drawings in a vector format or as an EPS file. Camera-ready art and photographs can be scanned by the editor.

### Advertising charges

Full page: \$90; Half page: \$50; Quarter page: \$25.  
Full year: 11 for the price of 9.

### Send copy to:

Frances Paterson  
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### Membership charges

\$52 per year \$26 half year (July to December)

### The Indexer

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