CONTENTS:

Indexing Chapter for AGPS Style Manual 37

Indexing as a Quality Control Mechanism for the Information Industry 41

New Members 44

AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY OF INDEXERS
Postal Address: G.P.O. Box 1251L
Melbourne, Victoria 3001

OFFICE BEARERS FOR 1987

PRESIDENT: John SIMKIN Phone 557 2815
VICE PRESIDENT: Josephine McGOVERN Phone 596 1555
SECRETARY: Karen BORCHARDT Phone 846 1820
TREASURER: Joyce KORN Phone 606 9610
COMMITTEE: Sue HARVEY Phone 418 7269

Ex Officio: Chairman, Panel of Assessors; Editor, Newsletter

All material appearing in the Newsletter is subject to copyright but may be reproduced for non-commercial purposes, provided that appropriate acknowledgement is made.

This publication is indexed and abstracted by The Australian Clearing House for Library and Information Science for Australian education index and Library and information science abstracts.
INDEXING CHAPTER FOR AGPS STYLE MANUAL

The discussion of the chapter on indexing, prepared for the next edition of the AGPS Style Manual, continues in this issue. George Levick, who prepared the chapter on behalf of the Society, responds to Janet D. Hine's article in our August Newsletter. We have also included articles on the chapter by Christopher Blackburn and Peter Creig, both reprinted from the Indexing and Abstracting Society of Canada's Bulletin vol.9, no.5, October 1987.

In her commentary on my article, Ms Hine raises a number of issues of which she says rightly that there are no final answers, and that they remain for the profession as a whole to discuss, perhaps indefinitely. I do not intend to debate those questions in any depth here: I hope that our respective contributions will stimulate a wider discussion. But on a number of points, general and particular, it seems to me that the article itself has been misunderstood - or misinterpreted - and in those matters, it is my job to reply.

Most generally, it should be remembered that my brief in writing the article in question was to provide a chapter for the AGPS Style Manual, on behalf of the Society. I was not trying to prepare a state-of-the-art message for indexers. I was trying to provide an introduction for other players in the publishing game to the functions and products of a fellow team-member; one that they do not always understand as well as we might like. If in doing so I was able to pass along just enough detail to allow a new indexer to begin to do an acceptable job, that has to be considered a bonus.

Nor was this a forum for my own preferences and practices. The sketch of a scheme for 'manual' index-preparation was actually derived from the (anonymous) chapter in the present edition of the Style Manual, for instance. I could equally have used, as my example, any of perhaps a dozen schemes that have been described in The Indexer and elsewhere, a number of which would have come closer to Ms Hine's. It just did not seem to me the place for a lengthy description of even the major variations, and the example nearest to hand seemed an adequate representation of orthodox practice. Similarly, though I suppose it is arguable that the circumstances of my day-to-day indexing have spoilt me for the pleasures of alphabeticning and filing - I work in an 'atmosphere of automation' - I do not think that the article over-emphasises the place of computer assistance in indexing. Indeed, I tried to play down the question of indexing mechanics altogether, in order to concentrate on the service the indexer does the publication as a whole.

On the wider issues, too, it is by no means merely my own view that indexers are sometimes embarrassed - and the quality of their work compromised - by their exclusion from the production (especially proofreading) stages of an index; or that room ought to be found for an introduction; or that the indexer deserves a word of acknowledgement. It is common, after all, to refer to such other creative contributors as editors and designers. I am sure we all know well the
feeling that one's work has been so circumscribed that to be named is at best inappropriate, but I don't believe that the situation giving rise to that feeling should be accepted as the norm, let alone recommended by default.

I am puzzled by the charge that I 'use that difficult word "reference" to mean all kinds of thing'. In fact, I cannot resist pointing out that while Ms Hine would like to see us say that 'an index ... contains two kinds of thing: entries and references', my article says, in this context, 'An index consists of two basic parts: the headings ... and the references ...'. (I go on to define entries as their sum, so to speak.) Ms Hine would apparently prefer to use 'entries' where I use 'headings', and 'citations' for 'references'. Except that my usage has the backing of a published standard, I do not see the practical difference. I have searched in vain for any inconsistency in my further use of the terms so defined.

George Levick

The August 1987 issue of the AusSI Newsletter contains a discussion by Janet Hine of Levick's chapter on indexing in the AGPS Style Manual. Hine feels the chapter contains some 'questionable proposals' that should be discussed further. Levick and Hine differ in their use of terms such as 'headings,' 'references,' 'cross-references,' and 'citations.' Personally I prefer Levick's explanation.

An index consists of two basic parts: the headings which are (almost always) words, representing some feature of the content of the main text; and the references, which are (almost always) numbers, indicating the precise occurrence of those features within the text. Together, these make up the index entries.

The headings may be divided into main headings, which are arranged in alphabetical order to provide the general sequence of the index; subheadings which are subordinate to the main headings, and arranged in a new sequence under each main heading; and sub-subheadings, similarly subordinate to the subheadings. [Examples follow]

... A special form of entry is the cross-reference, which directs the reader from one part of the index to another, rather than directly to the text. [Examples follow of see cross-references and of see also cross-references.]

Hine prefers the following use of terms:

I notice Mr Levick uses that difficult word 'reference' to mean all kinds of thing. Wouldn't it be easier all round to be able to say of an index as librarians can say of their catalogue, that it contains two kinds of thing: entries and references. We could then proceed to explain that entries consist of headings (compounded with subheadings as necessary) plus citations, that is the page numbers in most book indexes but potentially section numbers additionally volume numbers and dates for serial indexes; and that references may be either direct or indirect - or see or see also if we have to baby-talk our author.
I would agree with Janet Hine that 'it does help to have clear and unequivocal terms for things,' but Mr Levick's use of terms seems to me closer to indexing tradition, more sensible and easier to remember.

Among other comments, Hine indicates that she does not care for distinguishing incidental mentions (19, 20, 21) from covering pagination (116-21). She would use only covering pagination herself. I sometimes wonder about this, but I'm not sure it's a good idea to do away with the distinction altogether - what do other members think?

Hine seems to emphasize the importance of the author's ideas on indexes, at the possible expense of the index user. She says that authors are not against 'long strings of undifferentiated page numbers after headings.' She seems to be discussing only scholarly works, indicating that authors are 'positively proud of massive gatherings-together of instances of an important theme that has surfaced in many different connexions in their work.' (Doesn't it help the user to give some indication, through sub-headings, of the 'different connexions'?). I have always felt subheadings are important (assuming space is available) if there are more than a few references. 'Long strings of undifferentiated locators' are mentioned as one of the main reasons for an index being considered 'woefully inadequate' by Dr Hans Wellisch in the September Newsletter of the American Society of Indexers.

Some other of Hine's comments: She prefers her manual system to the use of computer-aided systems. She does not favour proofreading being done by the indexer - she feels this should be done by a proofreader. Levick suggests that an index should be preceded by an introductory note to help the user, 'at least to indicate the significance of any typographical variations, but preferably also referring to the system of alphabetical arrangement employed, any omission of indexable material (such as footnotes), and explaining any outstanding features of general indexing policy.' Hine, however, feels that a good index 'should be entirely self-explanatory.'

Hine's article will probably lead to further discussions in the AusSI Newsletter and perhaps elsewhere.

Christopher Blackburn

The May issue of the AusSI Newsletter (v. 11, no.2) hides some absolutely must reading for all indexers: 'Indexing Chapter for AGPS [Australian Government Publishing Service's] Style Manual.' The AGPS Style Manual has long enjoyed the reputation of being one of 'the best of any such book published by a government department for the guidance of editors and printers which has useful and fairly adequate instruction for indexing' (which was how the late L.M. Harrod began his review article to the 3rd edition of the manual in The Indexer, v.11, no.4, October 1979, pp. 232-234.)

The chapter on indexing which appears in the latest edition of the AGPS Style Manual was prepared, on behalf of the Australian Society of Indexers, by George Levick and is reproduced in its entirety in the May issue of the AusSI Newsletter (taking up virtually all of the issue). The introductory section is succinct but nicely balanced (definition of an index, need for indexes, further reading and responsibility for indexing). The balance of the chapter is equally well-honed and crisp. The initial portion is devoted to 'The Form
and Layout of an Index,' comprising 'Components of an Index' (headings + references = index entries, each introduced and defined and defined in a logical manner, plus an excellent discussion of cross-references, alphabetical arrangement and reference structure), followed by sections on 'The Indexing Process' (with equal emphasis on the indexer's responsibility to analyse and understand what is to be indexed as well as the ways and stages at which the work can be done vis a vis the publishing process), 'Indexing Equipment' (nicely divided between manual systems, a.k.a. cards, and computer-based systems), and culminated with 'The Finished Index' (revision, indexer should be responsible for the proofreading, preparation of index introductory matter and index acknowledgement). It must be noted that this material is not extensively treated, but it is adequately dealt with and fits the caveat in the introduction. 'A general introduction only is possible in this manual.'

What is so striking about the AGPS Style Manual indexing chapter is its simplicity of style and language, its comprehensiveness and the natural way in which the information is introduced - it just flows! The text is so well and clearly expressed that it should be compulsory reading for all authors, publishers, editors, indexers, information scientists and librarians.

Where does this new and exemplary classic fit in the galaxy of guides to indexing? The most obvious comparison would ostensibly be with the relevant chapters in The Chicago Manual of Style and with The Canadian-Style: A Guide to Writing and Editing. Such a comparison is neither appropriate nor possible. The Indexing chapters in The Chicago Manual and in the derivative The Canadian Style are both designed as stand-in manuals on indexing; in short they offer a condensation of more substantive texts such as Collison's Indexes and Indexing or Knight's Indexing, the Art of. The AGPS Style Manual chapter on indexing is far closer in scope and intent to Carey's Making an Index or to M. Jean Houston's Making an Index, both long out-of-print.

Levick's text provides a basic introduction, succinct and clear, to the art of indexing; frankly, any would-be indexer starting with either The Chicago Manual or The Canadian Style would not only be ill-advised but would also likely be turned off indexing unless absolutely desperate. Once the indexing chapter in the AGPS Style Manual has been assimilated then, and only then, should the intrepid reader or would-be indexer proceed to fill in some of the gaps in his or her knowledge with the suggestions made in the more authoritative texts.

Peter E. Greig
Society is suffering from information pollution. We are constantly being regaled with stories about the growth in the information industry. The range of information available now is greater than it has ever been; the growth in the workforce related to information activities is phenomenal; the number of advertisements in the Saturday papers for information technology projects seems to be increasing. For those of us in the information industry this is welcome recognition of our value at long last. For the information user, confusion reigns supreme.

In this paper I want to argue that it is the responsibility of the information industry to provide some control over the information industry so that the user can be provided with the efficient and effective service which is required. I will concentrate on computerised databases but much of what I have to say can be extrapolated to other areas of the industry. I intend to argue that we must introduce some quality control procedures and that indexing can be seen as a quality control mechanism for the information industry.

Just to frighten you a little, let me quote some figures from a recent Information World Preview. There are now some 3400 databases covering almost every imaginable subject and available through some 200 hosts throughout the world. Who can cope with 3400 databases let alone with 200 hosts. The number of databases has grown by nearly 1000 in the past eighteen months. The sheer numbers of services available is enough to frighten even the most experienced information professional. How can you be sure that when someone comes in with an unusual enquiry you have covered every possible source of information which may be relevant.

Other problems which arise are the fact that most databases are produced as a by-product of some other activity. They are not especially designed for users to easily retrieve the information they require. For example, many of the new databases are newspapers and business journals offered as full text of the original publication. We have all experienced the frustration of searching for information in these databases. They are time consuming to search, have a great deal of repetition, and some concepts such as 'information industry' are impossible to find. Very few of our products are designed specifically for the users of the information contained in them. How many other industries are so dependent on by-products to make enough money to support a whole industry. This is a contradiction in terms - by definition a by-product is a sideline which may make some extra money, but here are many people in the information industry who are trying to make a living from by-products alone.

Another problem is the lack of understanding by both users and computer experts of the idiosyncrasies of information. In particular the inverse relationship between precision and recall is poorly understood. How many times have we had to explain that it is only possible to have everything on a particular topic if one is prepared to accept some irrelevant material, and that if one only wants a few items, some are going to be missed. This idiosyncrasy makes giving the user exactly what he wants, all the key relevant items, those few things that he or she really need on a subject very difficult indeed.
With these three major difficulties - the size and confusion associated with our products, the fact that our products are not really designed for the users of the products and the specific idiosyncracies of our product - it is not surprising that some users are dissatisfied with our product.

I know that the Americans are paranoid about their economic performance of late, but I came across an interesting article recently which started me thinking on this topic. The article argued that the service industries in America are declining. Although the service industries now account for 68% of American GDP, this is probably a 1985 figure, it appears that the net positive trade balances in the services area have fallen steadily in the 1980s from $41 billion in 1980 to $21.4 billion in 1985. Similarly within the States, many of the large service companies are now foreign-owned, for example Twentieth Century Fox, Intercontinental Hotels, Saks Fifth Avenue and others. The article argues that the service industries are following the product industries into decline by the same processes, that is mismanagement. 'Daily we encounter the same inattention to quality, emphasis on scale economies and short-term orientation that earlier injured manufacturing.'

This started me thinking about quality control in the database business. Two other items attracted my attention. Cuadra's Directory of online databases showed that 106 databases and seven online services ceased operation in 1985-6. According to Cuadra

the vast majority of failed databases were what we classified as source databases. That is they provided such information as full text of a newsletter, stock prices, data on oil well drilling, or other types of original data ... reference databases, which provide citation and abstracts to articles or other types of reference information definitely seem more stable ...

According to Cuadra, nearly all the failed databases had been online for two or three days and were not 'fly-by-night' products.

In a recent interview published in Online currents, Katie Blake asked Martin Bueger from Dialog whether there is a move away from bibliographic to the fulltext database? Bueger replied that

There is definite interest by customers in having more fulltext information on Dialog ... Perhaps the best combination is that of indexing databases linked to fulltext databases ... We certainly see the value of indexing - the fulltext search is not necessarily first point of the search. There are real advantages in being able to search on the indexing database, and when the fulltext information is required it is also available but not necessarily in the same database.

I hope that by now I have convinced you that our current services are not satisfying the needs of our users, that some sort of quality control is required and that indexing appears to be an important aspect of quality control.

Indexing provides more access points for users, particularly as the range of people using a database may be quite different from those envisaged by the owner of the database. Here I am thinking of the fact that many databases are by-products of other services. Indexing can bring access points together, particularly if a thesaurus is used. Index medicus provides easy access to
all antibiotics, whereas other databases without the hierarchical thesaurus capacities can make this type of searching impossible. But most importantly, indexing provides consistency. Authors are notoriously inconsistent with the use of terms, and the need for clever headlines to attract our eye makes fulltext databases of magazines and newspapers, almost impossible to search for words in a meaningful way. It is obvious from the Cuadra and Bueger remarks that users have discovered this.

Computers can assist the indexing process, by vocabulary and spelling control, by automatic translation of terms for international databases, but indexing is still essentially a manual process. And because it is a manual process it is still very expensive.

With the help of some of my colleagues, I have estimated that it costs in the region of $15-20 to index one article for a database. Obviously this figure varies considerably depending on the database, the type of indexing involved, the extent to which a thesaurus is used, the amount of professional input and many other factors. But this is a large amount of money. Although most of us would agree that quality control is expensive, can we afford $15-20 for each article indexed?

Whether or not we can afford this depends on the benefits obtained from the article. This is very difficult to quantify. In general terms we can say that the article may be priceless, in individual terms we have all heard stories about the value of a particular item for an individual user. However because the value of the item depends on the use made of it by the individual it is impossible to make generalisations about cost-benefit ratios.

It is possible to quantify the extra cost of obtaining an item which was incorrectly or inadequately described. Let us assume that the article was obtained on interlibrary loan as a result of a search, at the moment this costs $3, shortly it will cost $6. Let us also assume that the article is to be read by a professional such as ourselves who is worth, let's say $60 per hour, a reasonable assumption considering overheads, probably a modest assumption but it makes the calculation easy, if we now spend 5 minutes reading the article, this article has cost us between $8 and $11 to decide that it really wasn't what we wanted. If we add a frustration factor, plus the cost of the librarian's time acquiring the article, it has certainly cost as much to find out that the article is not what we required as it did to index it. All of us have read abstracts and decided that we would like to obtain the full article only to find that it was not as useful as we had originally thought.

I do not wish to claim that all indexing is perfect and that the quality control involved in indexing is as good as it should be. But I am convinced that we, in the information industry should be looking more at the quality control methods which could be used in the industry and that indexing should be regarded as an important quality control mechanism.

Sue Harvey
NEW MEMBERS

The Society welcomes the following new members:

Mrs A. Burkhardt 21 William Street, Roseville, N.S.W. 2069
Ms C. Kearney 29 Susan Street, Annandale, N.S.W. 2038

NEWSLETTER - NOVEMBER ISSUE

We welcome contributions to the Newsletter. If you have any material you feel would be suitable for inclusion, please send it to the Editor, Australian Society of Indexers, G.P.O. Box 1251L, Melbourne, Vic. 3001, by Monday 25th January 1988.

Advertisements for publication in the Newsletter are now being accepted at the following rates:

- ½ inch block $5
- 1 inch block $10

To place an advertisement please forward text and appropriate cheque to:

The Editor,
Australian Society of Indexers,
G.P.O. Box 1251L
Melbourne, Victoria 3001

Closing date for next issue 25 January 1988