

ndexers

Newsletter

Alternative sources of work

Glenda Browne (freelance indexer)

Do you worry that one day computers will send you the way of the typing pool, or are you one of those indexers who sees botched efforts at computer understanding and says triumphantly "They'll never replace us!" Australian conferences in the last few years have examined "The Electronic Indexer" and "The Futureproof Indexer". I think a few of us breathed a sigh of relief when we saw that the world had learnt the value of human intervention in information systems. Nevertheless, I still have a nagging feeling that there are enormous changes coming up in the work we do.

Most of us use computer software for indexing, but beyond that we are also applying our skills in different areas, or applying new techniques to our work. The Cambridge University Press XML project (in which indexes are embedded in the text then generated as XML documents) is an example of traditional indexing skills being applied in a more complex technological environment. These indexers have to know all about indexing, and also about embedding (and perhaps a little about XML too). And while programs that try and index books are still obviously immature, automatic techniques are making inroads into fields such as categorisation and metadata creation. The question is not whether we think these programs are as good as us, but whether the people who employ us are convinced that these programs are worth using.

In this article I'd like to briefly mention a few indexing jobs I've been involved with that show some of the range of opportunities and requirements for indexers.

Overseas work

The Internet now lets us work anywhere in the world. While this is a threat to the high-wage countries, it is an opportunity for the English-speaking low-wage countries and for people

with specialist skills seeking specialist work. A practical disadvantage is that we have to hand over a big fee to the banks for conversion of each overseas currency cheque.

Print and web formats

Lots of publishers now want to provide their information in print and on the web, and may need advice on the optimal indexing of these products. Jon Jermey and I have been involved in two projects using databases to generate indexes in a number of different formats. In one project we set up a database to manage the indexes of a number of procedure manuals for a government department, enabling the production of individual print indexes, and a combined online index.

In another project we use a database to generate index output for a periodical for a one-year print index, a cumulative web index, and as a monthly XML file for Medline. This is the first year the bulletin has been in Medline, and we have had to extend the database to include extra fields. The subject indexing — which is the specialist skill I offer — has become a tiny part of the whole project, and database skills are a crucial feature. I'm sure we will all do more work in the future in partnership with computing specialists, and will need a working

knowledge of programs such as Access.

Online help

For over three years I worked one day a week as an indexer for an insurance company, mainly indexing an online help system which provided underwriting and procedural information for staff in a number of states of Australia. There is the potential for similar jobs in other large organisations, if only those who are managing the jobs ever spoke to indexers. We have very little contact with a lot of people who are potential clients, and should, perhaps, meet more often with technical communicators, archivists, records managers, knowledge managers, website designers, and cataloguers.

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GPO Box 2069, Canberra ACT 2601

Notice

Annual General Meetings

National and ACT Region Branch
See opposite page.

New South Wales Branch

The NSW Branch AGM will be held on Wednesday 12 March. For details see page 5.

To nominate members for positions obtain a nomination form from the Secretary at nswbranch@aussi.org. Signed nominations must reach the Branch's postal address by 19 February 2003.

Victorian Branch

The Annual General Meeting of the Victorian Branch will be held at Graduate House, 224 Leicester Street, Carlton on Tuesday 18 February 2003. Pre-dinner drinks and nibbles at 7 p.m. prior to commencement of a 3-course dinner at 7.30 p.m.

Cost, including wines, soft drinks, fruit juices, tea/coffee, and three-course menu is \$35 for members and guests. Please let us know of any dietary considerations when you RSVP. Dress is smart casual.

During the evening there will be a brief AGM, consisting of the President's and Treasurer's report and the election of office bearers. A highlight of the evening will be the Indexers Medal Award announcement and our Guest Speaker Lynn Farkas.

RSVP to the Treasurer on (03) 9830 0494 or email anp@mydesk.net.au no later than Tuesday, 11 February 2003.

Society of Editors (NSW)

The Society of Editors (NSW) will hold its Annual General Meeting on Tuesday, 4 March at the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts, 280 Pitt Street, Sydney (between Park & Bathurst Streets, near the Pilgrim Theatre and Pitt Street Uniting Church; the closest train station is Town Hall), at 6.30 p.m. for 7.00 p.m. Drinks and light refreshments provided. \$13 for members; \$16 for non-members and those who don't RSVP; \$7 for holders of a current Centrelink or DVA concession card. Please RSVP to 9294 4999 (voicemail) or brhed@pnc.com.au (email) by Friday, 31 January.

Membership statistics

As of 18 November 2002, AusSI membership statistics are:

ACT	34	SA	6
NSW	47	Tas	3
NT	1	Vic	50
NZ	7	WA	4
Qld	15		
Total			167

AusSI National committee meeting schedule for 2003

- 15 April
- 17 June
- 19 August
- 21 October
- 16 December

New members

We extend a warm welcome to the following new members:

- Mr Grant Bailey, NSW
- Ms Megan Edwards, Vic
- Ms Lita Harrington, SA
- Mr Michael Mamouny, Vic
- Ms Fiona Mottram, Vic
- Dr An Van den Borre, ACT
- Emma Wauchope, SA
- Lesley Wilson, NZ

Request for information

I am hoping you may be able to help me with some research I am undertaking on behalf of a member of the UK Society of Indexers. I am looking into the difference in business or operational performance of having well referenced manuals and documentation that assists people to learn new processes or follow procedures. If you happen to know of any papers, articles, features, statistics or websites where I may find such information I would be extremely grateful for your assistance.

*Graham Parker, Parker Communications,
Sheffield, UK*

*Email info@parkercommunications.co.uk
Website www.parkercommunications.co.uk*

Would members replying please send a copy to the Editor for inclusion in the next Newsletter — Ed.



Australian Society of Indexers

The Annual General Meetings of Australian Society of Indexers (National) *and* Australian Society of Indexers ACT Region Branch

The National AGM will be held first followed by the ACT AGM and dinner. Members guests welcome.

Date: Friday 7 March 2003
Time: 7.00 for 7.30pm
Venue: The Brassey of Canberra, Belmore Gardens, Barton
Dinner Cost: \$30.00 per person
The Brassey is licensed (BYO not permitted)
Dinner cost includes pre-dinner drinks: all other drinks extra

**The guest speaker will be Gabrielle Hyslop,
Acting Assistant Director General: Public and Readers Services
at the National Archives of Australia. Gabrielle will speak on:
Taking it to the people: Making the Archives more accessible .**

For further information contact:

Shirley Campbell Ph: (02) 6285 1006 (Home) or Email: shirley.campbell@alianet.alia.org.au
Geraldine Triffitt Ph: (02) 6241 4289 (Home) or geraldine.triffitt@alianet.alia.org.au

RSVP with payment by Monday 3 March 2003
to the Australian Society of Indexers (ACT Region Branch), Box 2069, Canberra ACT 2601

Yes, I will be attending the AGMs and dinner.

Name:

Contact phone number:

Amount enclosed (please make cheques payable to Australian Society of Indexers
(ACT Region Branch):
.....

Special dietary requirements:



Australian Society of Indexers

Notice of Annual General Meeting: New South Wales Branch

The Annual General Meeting of the Australian Society of Indexers will be held at 6.30 pm on Wednesday 12 March 2003.

The AGM will be held at the New Hong Kong Restaurant, 44 Macleay Street, Potts Point, NSW 2011 (tel: 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 AGM will be followed by a Chinese banquet, at the subsidised cost of \$30.00 per person, drinks included.

RSVP: Alan Walker by 10 March 2001
(tel: 9368 0174, fax: 9358 5593, email: <vicepres@aussi.org>)

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Metadata and taxonomies

A number of AusSI members have been involved in metadata and taxonomy projects in the last few years. Here we can use indexing skills on a large, and global, level. This work often requires more than one indexer to cope with the work and deadlines, so organisation skills and quality control become important. In addition, we need to learn how we fit in the overall team, and to use the skills of other people in essential areas such as user testing of the work we do.

Website indexes

While I'd love to see website indexes commonly used on the web, they just don't seem to have taken off. They do exist, thank goodness, on websites of our various societies, and I have recently been asked to write a proposal for indexing a collection of papers. So there's hope still, but not a lot happening now.

Knowledge management

Lots of companies are now using large content management systems to or-

ganise their documentation. Many of these include search and categorisation modules that are not used at all, or are implemented badly. There is scope for involvement of information specialists in this field, but we have to network with people in this field.

For example, the Online Help system I indexed was converted to HTML and moved to the intranet in a trial project to see whether the two sets of content could be combined. The project manager set aside a day for me to evaluate Search. This was of value firstly because the search evaluation showed up problems with the whole system (mainly that many of the pages were not included at all because of licence limits, search rules about omitting certain pages, and an unexpected starting point for the spider). Secondly, Search showed up inadequacies with information retrieval compared to the indexed online help, and some possible remedies. (The online help indexing terms were used as metadata on the intranet, but specially crafted metadata would be of more value).

Another area in which indexers could usefully get involved is in the evaluation, and tweaking, of automatically generated taxonomies and categorisation systems produced using

software from companies such as Autonomy, Verity, and Stratify. These programs often create taxonomies (thesauri of sorts) that are appalling, but once they have a decent taxonomy they can produce reasonable categorisation. To have someone working on these systems from the user's perspective could make the difference between a system that works and a complete flop.

Conclusion

While I'd be happy for the indexing profession to remain unchanged, I just don't think this will happen. I've already seen technical encroachment in jobs I do, as well as possibilities in new areas. I think manual indexing of quality books will continue for a long time, because the output of automatic programs is just not good enough. However, clients may require embedding or other specialised features beyond the plain text index. I also think computers will make inroads into indexing jobs such as the creation of metadata and categorisation of corporate information. Whether we lose out in the long run will depend on how happy we are to slot into new roles.

*This article was written for SIDelights.
— Ed.*

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National Meeting

Outlook Workshop

Date: 8 March 2003

Time: 9.30 a.m.—4.30 p.m.

Venue: National Archives of Australia, Parkes ACT

Participants:

Members of the National Committee including all ex-officio members. If NSW and Victorian presidents are unable to attend, alternative participants can be nominated.

Cost: Travel and accommodation expenses will be funded for interstate participants and paid for out of the national account.

Program:

Identify issues for action, decide how they will be addressed, set timeline to carry out.

Issues for discussion could include:

- goals of the Society for 2003
- membership
- public presentation of Society including website, newsletter, corporate logo
- function of publicity and promotions
- constitution — identify issues to be looked at, for example, length of tenure of national committee, date of AGM
- goals for 2003
- role of national committee
- review of subcommittees, including formalisation of processes for reporting to the National Executive/Committee
- financial objectives
- training
- communication — internal and external
- policies and guidelines — for example who represents Society
- backup procedures to cope with crisis situations

Newsletter deadlines for 2003

The schedule is based on delivery to members on the third Thursday before the end of each month.

Issue	Deadline	Issue	Deadline
February	24 January	August	25 July
March	21 February	September	22 August
April	21 March	October	26 September
May	25 April	November	24 October
June	23 May	December	21 November
July	27 June		

The finger of suspicion points at you !!

On Thursday 19 March Ian Forrester, Senior Fingerprint Expert with the Victoria Police will address a public meeting at ACER (Australian Council for Educational Research) situated at 19 Prospect Hill Road Camberwell.

Ian has had nineteen years experience in the identification of persons by means of ridge characteristics, commonly called fingerprints. He is on the Board of Examiners for the National Accreditation Board for Fingerprint Assessment throughout Australia and has studied at many overseas locations including New Scotland Yard, NYPD, South Africa, Canada, etc., as well as training Fingerprint Officers in both Malaysia and Australia for the Royal Malaysian Police and the Vietnam Police Service.

It has been ten years or more since we had a speaker from the Fingerprint Branch and since then there have been many wonderful technological advances in this science. Our interest, as indexers, will be in finding out how the records are stored, recorded and matched. We are fortunate in having Ian's expertise and experience in the classification, search and identification of latent fingerprints from scenes of crimes.

The format of the lecture will commence with the inception of fingerprint identification, how it developed and progressed over the years from a manual system to the automated one now in operation. He will also include crime scenes, what the Fingerprint Branch does and how they do it, providing a few examples.

Ian's presentation will commence after our usual welcome and advice about forthcoming training courses, excursions, social events, etc. He will take us through to about 7.30 pm after which we adjourn to a nearby restaurant for further quizzing of our dinner guest.

Entry is free and we extend an invitation to all students, editors, information professionals, librarians to join with us in finding out about our 'unique' identifier.

RSVP :Jenny Restarick ph/fax 03 9528 2539 email: jenny.restarick@csiro.au

VICTORIAN BRANCH

Indexing training

The Australian Society of Indexers (Vic Branch) is conducting two one-day introductory indexing training courses at ACER, in Camberwell. A course on back-of-book indexing will be held on February 10 and a database/pictorial course held on February 11. For further details about either course please contact Max McMaster, Training Officer, either by email: mindexer@optusnet.com.au or phone/fax: (03) 9500 8715.



Victorian Branch Annual General Meeting

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RSVP to the Treasurer on (03) 9830 0494 or email annp@mydesk.net.au no later than Tuesday, 11 February 2003.

The Australian Pictorial Thesaurus (APT)

The Australian Pictorial Thesaurus (APT) at www.picturethesaurus.gov.au is a collection of topic terms for indexing Australian images and collections. The APT uses contemporary Australian terminology to describe collections, and is intended to assist the common description of pictorial collections across Australian libraries, museums and archives.

The APT has been running for approximately two years and as part of ongoing evaluation procedures, the State Library of NSW is interested in hearing from users of the thesaurus, especially from users who are not registered. Any users of APT would you please take a few minutes to answer the following questions and email your answers to akingsco@sl.nsw.gov.au

It would be appreciated if you could respond by 7 February.

- How did you first hear about the APT?
- Are you a registered user of APT?
- If you are a registered user of APT, what made you decide to register with the APT? For example to download the thesaurus or so you could suggest new terms.
- What do you use the APT for?

The survey feedback will be used to improve/enhance APT services and all responses will be kept confidential.

*Allison Kingscote
APT Coordinator
Ph: (02) 9273 1444*

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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). Do not embed footnotes in Word files.

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
ph (02) 4268 5335
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