

The FutureProof Indexer

27–28 September 1997

Katoomba, NSW

Table of contents

Papers

- What's on indexer's minds? — Key issues on Index-L, by Glenda Browne
- The Future of Indexing — what do users expect? by Roxanne Missingham

External link

- Future-proofing a global internet index by a targeted web spider and embedded searches by Graham Greenleaf

Papers given at the Future Proof Indexer Conference, Katoomba, NSW, 27-28 Sep 1997, Australian Society of Indexers.

Key issues on Index-L

Glenda Browne

© 1998 Glenda Browne.

Abstract

Index-L is an electronic mailing list available through the Internet. It is used by book, journal and online indexers, as well as by editors, academics, technical writers and others interested in issues relating to indexing. The main users, however, are probably freelance book indexers.

Index-L is a forum for discussion of issues related to indexing, ranging from practical issues such as scheduling and quoting, to personal issues such as how your cat relates to your computer. Specific indexing choices are discussed (e.g. styles and entry words) as are general policies and relations with editors. Some jobs are advertised, and notice of meetings and conferences is given. The list is important for moral support as well as for exploration of intellectual and practical issues. Examples of typical discussion 'threads' will be given in this talk.

What is Index-L?

Index-L is an electronic mailing list available through the Internet. A mailing list enables a group of people to send messages to, and receive messages from, all other members of the group. The distribution of mail is fully automated, and the list-owner coordinates the list, and deals with any problems.

Index-L is a forum for discussion of issues related to indexing, ranging from practical issues such as scheduling and quoting, to personal issues such as what indexers do in their spare time. Specific indexing choices are discussed (e.g. styles and entry words) as are general policies and relations with editors. Some jobs are advertised, and notice of meetings and conferences is given.

Index-L is an important source of information and support for indexers and enables indexers from around the world to share ideas. This type of communication is particularly important in a field such as indexing, where many people work in relative isolation, communicating professionally with other indexers only at meetings and occasional conferences.

Newsgroups are democratic, and enable people to share ideas no matter what their qualifications, sex, colour, or whatever. No-one need know who you are or what you look like; all that matters is what you write. Paradoxically, however, one of the joys of this newsgroup is discovering what the other contributors are like, as people. Discussion of political correctness in indexing brought personal responses from people from minority groups. A query "What else do indexers do?" brought an avalanche of responses including other work, and also lists of hobbies and other lifestyle choices. A question of mine on combining indexing with family life brought a number of personal responses and good advice.

Of course the flip side of the democratic nature of unmoderated newsgroups means that useless messages are mixed with the useful. On Index-L this is a minor problem, and the useless messages are mainly unsubscribe messages that have been sent to the wrong place, and the occasional spam (inappropriate advertising message).

After subscribing for a number of years you find that there are recurrent issues for discussion (e.g. rates, getting started, multiple indexes, use of prepositions). Judicious use of the archives (and sometimes a textbook) would free the list of this repetition. It is much nicer,

however, to interrogate a vital friendly list than the huge unorganised archive, and the questions and responses continue.

How to subscribe and contribute

To subscribe to Index-L you need a computer, modem, and Internet connection. Subscription is free, but you will have to pay charges for Internet access and for online time and downloading data (different Internet Service Providers have different charges).

To subscribe, send the message:

Subscribe INDEX-L Firstname Lastname

to the list address: lyris@listserv.unc.edu

replacing 'Firstname Lastname' with your name. If you have an automatic signature file you should turn it off.

You will then receive subscription information. You should save this information as you will need it if you want to unsubscribe, and you may need it for other information about the list.

There is a list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ list) and answers. This list includes details about indexing software, useful publications, etc. It is updated from time to time, and the new FAQ is then sent to all subscribers (this was last done in October 1996). Its aim is to prevent the list getting clogged with these common questions.

The subscription message gives details of how to write to the list and reply to other messages. Most subscribers start by lurking, that is, reading messages to get a feel for the tone of the list before replying. Many then introduce themselves in their first message as a 'newbie', and receive warm welcomes to the list.

Who is on Index-L?

Subscribers are mainly book, journal and online indexers. Different perspectives on indexing are given by editors, academics, and technical writers. Many subscribers are 'wannabes' who are studying indexing, or hoping to branch out from related fields such as librarianship.

At the moment subscribers come mainly from the United States and Great Britain, with a smattering from Europe, Canada and Australia.

There are many more subscribers than contributors, so your writings reach more people than you might expect. As one subscriber warned with a smilie wink: "Be careful what you say about the editors who employ you, as they might be lurking".

What are Index-Lers like?

As many newbies have commented, Index-Lers in general are helpful and dedicated. In 'water-cooler' discussions they share the trials and joys of indexing. They tell how they exercise, what else they do, and how they got started. They tend to be educated and interested. Some live in the country and intersperse bursts of indexing with chores such as chopping wood and milking cows. Because of this ways of speedily sending page proofs and indexes are crucial, hence much discussion of the FedEx system (in the U.S.), and some of electronic delivery.

INDEX-L discussion topics

I will highlight a number of INDEX-L discussion topics in the conference talk.

Topics discussed on Index-L include practical issues of importance to freelancers such as marketing and coping with deadlines, and nuts and bolts issues such as the correct form of names, use of multiple indexes, and organisation and order of page numbers. Philosophical issues such as whether an index should be 'dumbed down' to ensure that a wider range of people will be able to use it are also discussed. Index-L is a good source of information about

indexing software and hardware, including ergonomic keyboards, lighting, and uninterruptable power supplies.

Developing issues

Much of the content on Index-L is very practical discussion of issues currently facing indexers. Developing issues include electronic indexing (including indexing of CD-ROMs), and embedded indexing (e.g. using FrameMaker). Announcements of developments such as the free availability of Medline through the Internet keep indexers up-to-date, as have brief discussions on the concept of meta-data.

Conclusion

On Index-L you can participate as much or as little as you like. You can lurk only, or you can share your own expertise, while gaining from the expertise of others. Index-L is a great way to communicate with the international community of indexers, and to share the feelings of interest, stimulation, frustration, exhaustion and exhilaration than indexing brings.

Papers presented at the Future Proof Indexer Conference, Katoomba, NSW, 27-28 Sep 1997, Australian Society of Indexers.

Future of Indexing: what do users expect?

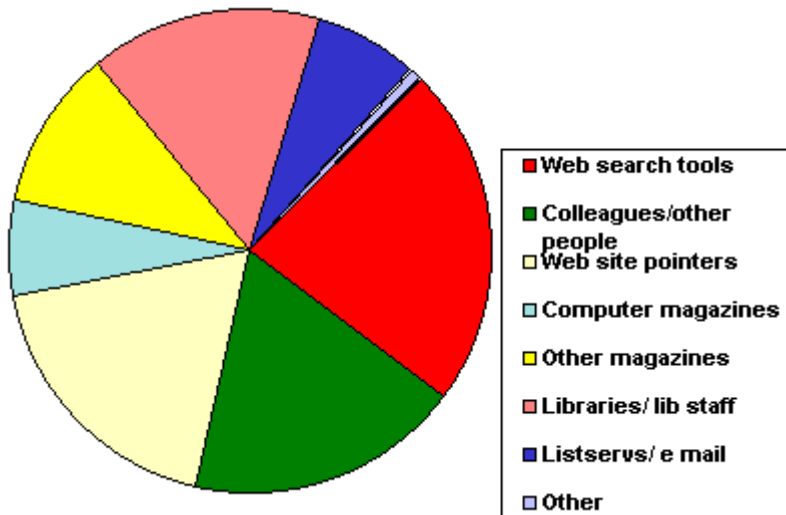
Roxanne Missingham, Divisional Librarian, CSIRO Wildlife & Ecology

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

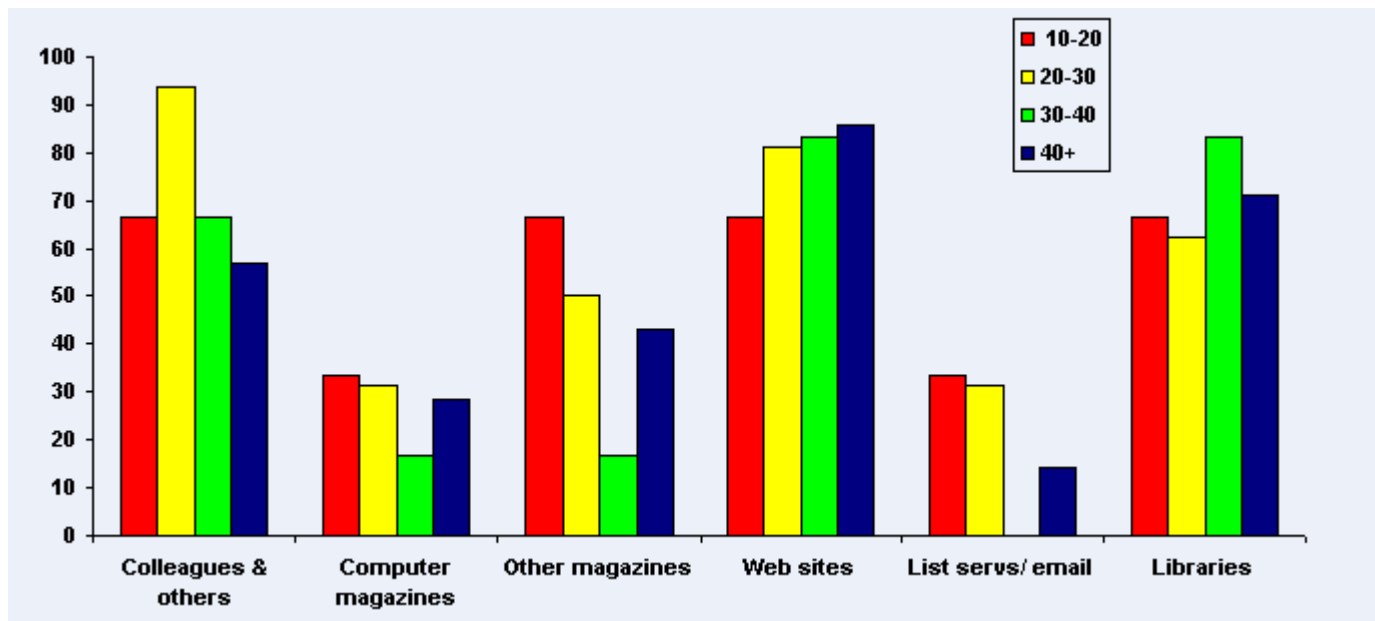
1. Management and retrieval of books, journals and other library material
Mostly undertaken by library staff
2. Management and retrieval of records
Mostly undertaken by records management staff and archivists
3. Management and retrieval of information about articles, conference papers and books (database)
Mostly undertaken by database indexers and library staff
4. Management and retrieval of web sites
Undertaken by a variety of Information Technology and Information Management staff
5. 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. From the 32 responses received:

- All students 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:
 1. Colleagues (equal 1 st ranking)
 2. Pointers from other web sites (equal 1 st ranking)
 3. Libraries and library staff (3 rd ranking)
 4. Magazines (other than computer magazines)
 5. Listserv messages
 6. Computer magazines

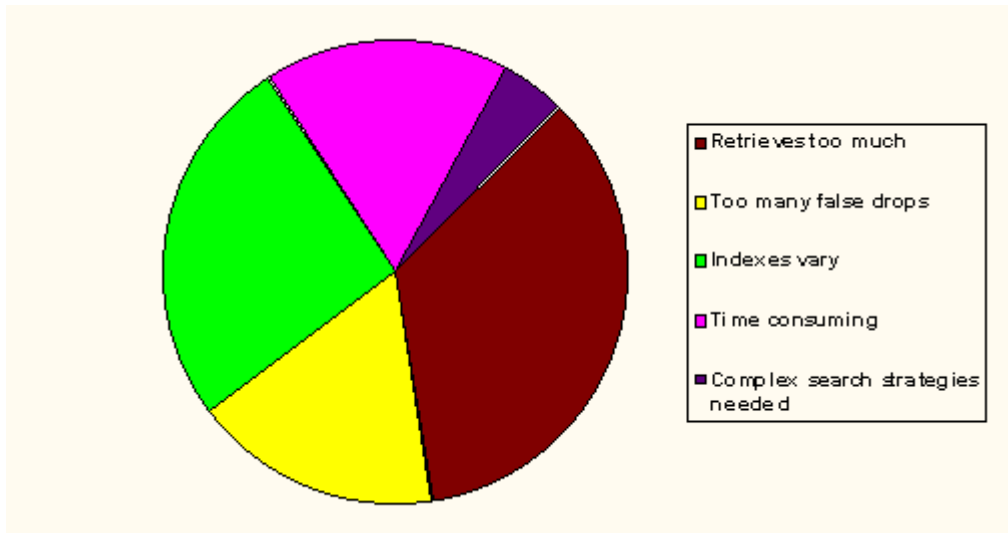


When age is considered for the responses there seem to be variations for the group 30-40 and 20-30. Individuals in the 20-30 year age group are the majority of the responses. They used colleagues and other people to a greater extent that other forms of information. The 30-40 year age group used libraries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

A graphical representation of the concerns expressed in comments can be seen in the following figure:



A very important questions 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 emergence of Metadata, or standards for data about data on Internet (primarily web) sites.

What is metadata?

At its simplest metadata has 2 attributes:

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

Lagoze

[From Lagoze, C (1996) The Warwick Framework : A Container Architecture for Diverse Sets of Metadata, *D-Lib magazine July/August 1996*]

1. Content or data is a first class object
2. Metadata or data about data is a second class object
3. 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 and 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
- Instructional Management Systems Project
- AusGILS (Australian Government Information Locator Service)

Under development

Now it's over to you!!!!