

CINDEX vs Sky Index

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Keyword Editorial Services

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Reviews and compares the recently released versions of the two principal Windows-based computer software packages designed to assist professional indexers in compiling back-of-book-style indexes. Considers the "look and feel" of each. Compares the relative ease of data entry and editing, the sorting capabilities, index management features, cross-reference and authority structure, formatting capabilities, methods for producing printed and machine-readable output, and online and printed documentation. Lists the prices, makes recommendations for purchase based on users' needs, and provides a table comparing the features of each.

Introduction

Cindex (from Indexing Research in the USA) has been around in DOS form for many years, as one of two major software packages for professional indexers (along with Macrex). The latest DOS version is 6.1, released in 1997. A Macintosh version was also released in 1997. "Cindex for Windows version 1" has been completely rewritten for Windows, and runs under Windows 95 or later. As you would expect, it retains nearly all the features of the latest DOS version and includes further features. In general, it works in much the same way as the DOS version, with the changes you would expect in any transfer to the Windows environment. An upgraded version 1.5 was released in 1999.

Sky Index (from Sky Software, also in the USA) began life as a DOS program designed specifically for genealogists, and released as a Windows product in 1995. It was simple to use and inexpensive, and an ideal tool for those who had to compile a fairly simple index from time to time, but who were not professional indexers. It simplified data entry, particularly for name indexes, and exported a raw index file to a word-processor for final editing. "Sky Index Version 5.1" is an improved version of the earlier genealogists' tool, with additional data entry and formatting features that allow more editing to be done from within Sky Index before export to a word-processor. The release reviewed here is rev. 991203.

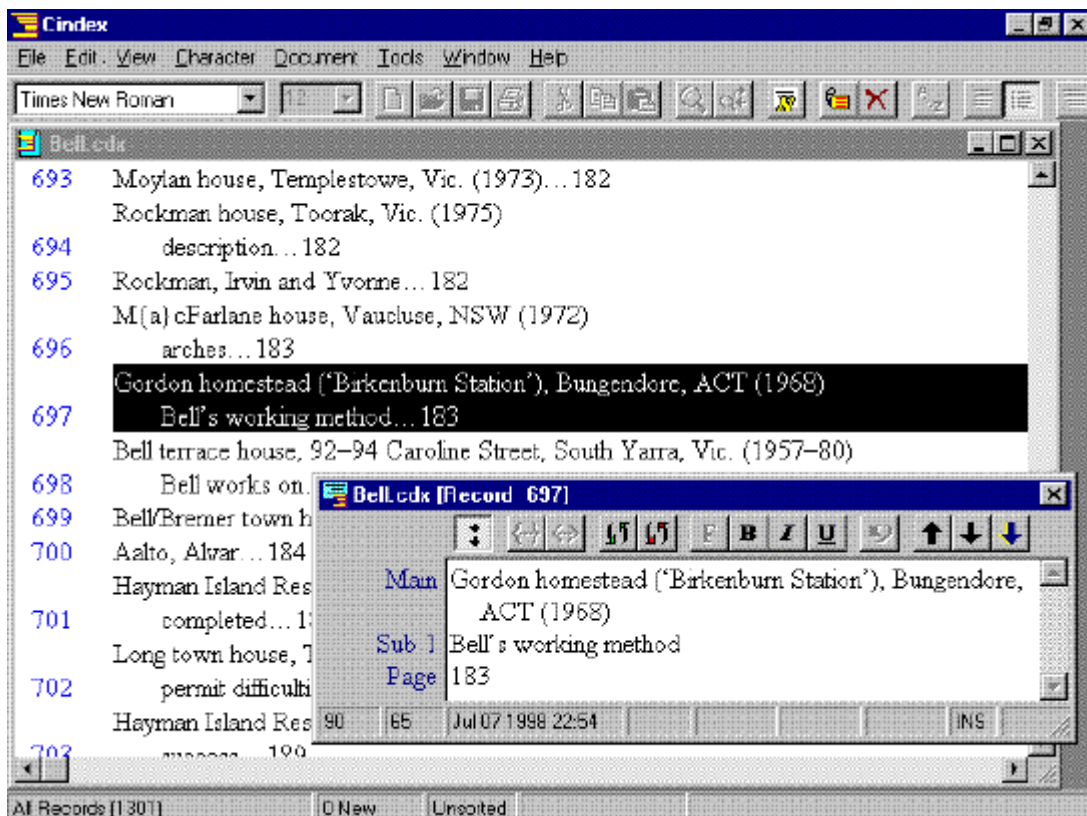
Presentation

The appearance of the screen is probably the biggest difference between these two programs.

Cindex has a slick and extremely professional finish. It really does look as if it has been written by a large and experienced software house. All its icons and dialogue boxes have the familiar Microsoft feel, and I immediately felt comfortable with its feel and confident in its high design standards. The toolbar is a bit full — if you have a small screen you may find that the new buttons fall off the edge of the screen; if so, you can customise the toolbar by deleting a few of the less-used buttons. Sky Index's more extensive icons automatically wrap when they won't fit across the screen, and you can also customise the toolbar to display certain groups of icons.

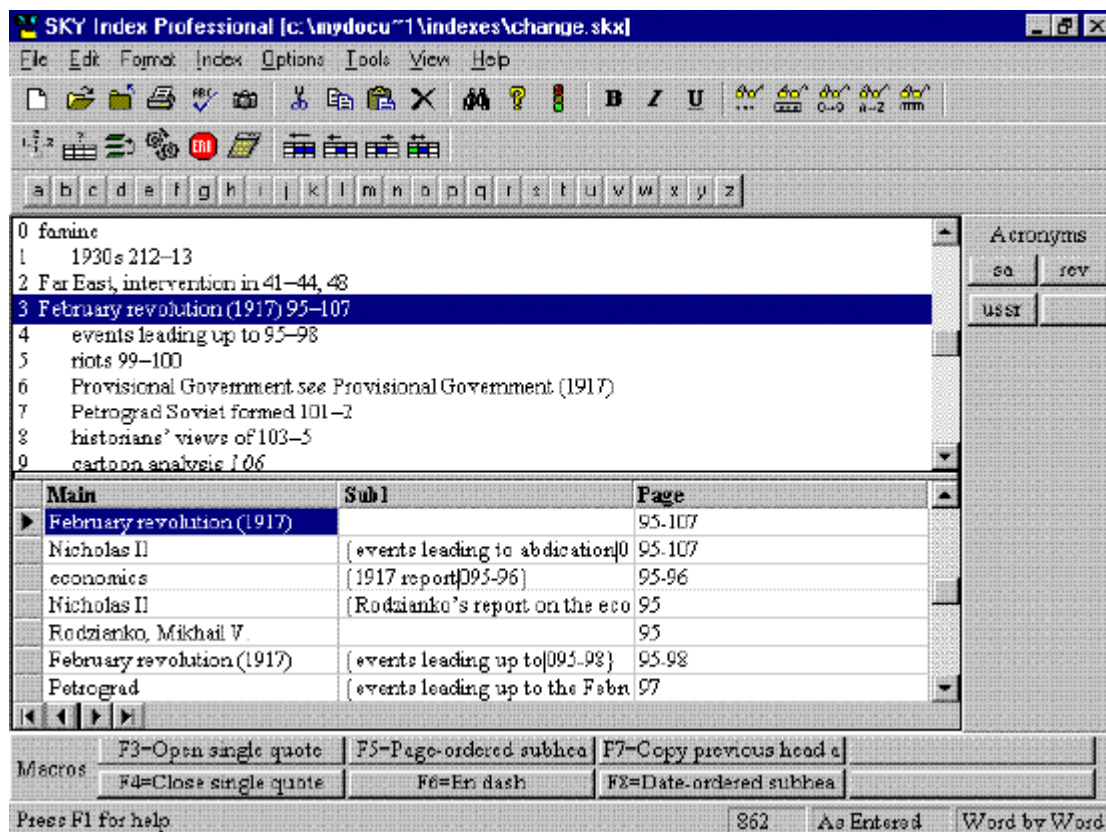
Cindex is written for Windows 95 and will not run on earlier versions. It takes full advantage of the 32-bit functionality — every process appears to be carried out instantaneously, even on my slow old Pentium 133. Sky Index is written for Windows 3.1x, although it operates perfectly in Windows 95. You can't choose long file names or different default working directories. Some of its processing operations run more slowly, and in a large index it feels as though you often have to wait. This distinction between Cindex and Sky Index becomes very marked in operations like finding, sorting or verifying/error scanning. The last two are usually carried out only once or twice per index; but in a large Sky Index index, finding text (and other operations dependent on scanning the file) can be quite

slow. Remember, though, that most time spent in indexing is in thinking or keying, so the time spent on computer processing is insignificant.



Both let you view the index in a variety of "view" formats. In Cindex, you can choose between "unformatted" and "draft" views (both of which show record numbers as well as formatting and sorting codes) and "formatted" view, which displays the index exactly as it will print out — but more on formatting later. All "views" can be displayed in "sorted" or "unsorted" (that is, record number) order, at any number of subheading levels. In addition, you can restrict which records appear in your view (and can therefore limit any processing to them) by a number of parameters, such as those added in the current session, those modified in the current session, those marked for deletion, or those records that you have marked for some process. You can display the index in page number order by clicking an icon in the toolbar.

The Sky Index screen is split into two basic resizeable sections. At the top is the "Preview pane", where entries are displayed *approximately* how they will print. The final typeface and size and the line length are not displayed; more importantly, subheads are always displayed in set-out format, even if they are set to print run-on. Below this is the "Entry grid", where you carry out all entry and editing operations, and formatting and sorting codes are displayed. The Preview pane is always displayed in sorted order; the Entry grid can be displayed in sorted order, page number order, order of entry, and a couple of other views, all with a single mouse click.



Data entry

Apart from the screen appearance, the data entry metaphor is the major distinguishing feature of the two products.

Cindex continues its metaphor from the DOS version of the index card: you fill in one "card" and Cindex files it automatically for you, according to your pre-set instructions. The Windows interaction is a huge improvement on the DOS version: in the background is the index, in one of a variety of formats and sort orders, while overlaid on this is the index "card" which can be quickly and easily resized and moved anywhere on screen. When you "file" the "card", the entry files immediately in its correct place and format, and the "card" is blanked, ready for a new entry.

The Sky Index metaphor is that of a database or spreadsheet table, with rows, columns and cells. Each row on the grid is an index entry; each column is a level of heading, subheading, or page reference. Each cell can be manipulated independently, and its contents moved or copied to any other cell in a variety of ways.

In both programs, new records are added to the end of the sequence. You can repeat the page reference automatically from the previous record or copy it manually with a keystroke; copy various fields from the previous record; duplicate records; or swap fields.

Both have keyboard shortcuts for commonly used terms, allowing you to type a few letters which are expanded automatically; Cindex calls these "abbreviations" and Sky Index "acronyms". Although they are easy to use in both programs, in Sky Index they are very easy to set up, simply a mouse click; but in Cindex setting up is comparatively complicated and initially confusing — you need to open a separate file of abbreviations with a rather unhelpful user interface.

When entering data you often want to copy text from another location in the index. In Sky Index you can drag text from any cell to any other cell visible in the same display, and easily cut-and-paste

between those that are not. However, you cannot drag text into the index from outside, from another index or a text document that you are indexing. In Cindex, you can drag text from outside the index, either another index or a text document, but you cannot drag it between entries within the same index.

Type-ahead feature

Both programs have a "type-ahead" feature, in Sky Index called "Auto entry" facility, and in Cindex "Auto-Completion". As you type, the program second-guesses what you are about to type, based on earlier entries and the number of times you have typed them. Depending on the sort of text you are indexing, and your typing skills (mine are abysmal), you can save an enormous amount of keying time.

The approach of the two packages is rather different. Sky Index builds a list of terms separate from the index file. This means that you can save it separately for use in other indexes, or import a list from an existing index, a great time-saver when indexing periodicals or multi-part publications. The list is compiled from individual cells as each record is entered, so it can be set to complete terms that appear at any level of heading of any record — this is very important in an index that uses the same subheadings over and over. You can refresh the AutoEntry list to eliminate mistyped terms that have since been corrected, or to create a new list for an index that does not already have one.

Cindex appears to use the index itself as the source of Auto-Completion. This has the advantage that the latest spelling of a term is always available. However, it has the drawback that it will complete a subheading only if that subheading is already attached to the heading you are entering. Nor can you save the list separately or import it into another index. An optional setting allows you to view the entry it is using as the source of text.

Special characters

Both programs let you enter accented letters and symbols, from any Windows font you have loaded. Cindex uses its own management system, while Sky Index invokes the character map that comes with Windows.

Number of subheadings

Cindex allows up to 16 levels of heading, subheading and page reference; Sky Index allows five. In practice, both of these are more than most indexers will ever use. Sky Index does not permit more than one level of subheading in run-on format, which I have found a severe limitation for some indexes.

Page references

As mentioned, in both programs page references can be set to copy automatically from the previous record, so both programs can perform calculations on page numbers. In Sky Index, pressing the plus key (whichever cell the cursor is in) increments the page number by one. Sky Index also corrects batches of page references that have been incorrectly entered. If the client adds or deletes pages, both programs let you increment or decrement a range of page references by any specified amount.

Sometimes it is easy to end up with messy location references, especially if you have been flipping records or merging indexes, so that you can end up with a string like "129, 129–136, 130, 131–132, 136". In formatted view, Cindex automatically displays these correctly, as "129–136". Although Sky Index does not correct such errors automatically, when you scan for errors it picks up such strings and displays them as improperly formed entries.

Both programs accommodate volume numbers in a variety of formats.

The formatting of locators in both programs is extremely flexible.

Sky Index lets you choose between three span separators for normal output, whereas Cindex allows you to enter any symbol or text you please as a span separator. In Sky Index you *can* specify any character if you choose "Custom" output, but this entails inserting all output coding manually and is not for the faint-hearted.

In Sky Index you can choose between five styles of span abbreviation; Cindex has three.

You can enter abbreviated page ranges and Sky Index will expand them for you, e.g. to enter 11:C.104–11:C.107 you only need to type 11:C.104-7.

Both programs allow the use of reserved characters (such as a comma separating references): in Cindex you precede or enclose such characters by special formatting characters, in Sky Index you set up a "Translation Table". This table also allows you to abbreviate frequently used text like "f" for "fig."

Both programs let you begin indexing at any part of a book using provisional page numbers (provided the page breaks remain constant), and assign page numbers at the end. In Cindex the replacement process is difficult to set up; you use the pattern matching capability of the "replace" function, which took me some time to master. In Sky Index it is a straightforward matter of choosing options in a simple dialogue box.

Record size

Record size in Cindex must be set. The factory default is 100 characters, but it is very easy to change this, either as your default, or for each index. However, it is extremely irritating when you run out of space when you are entering a record, and you have to interrupt your train of thought to exit data entry mode and reset the record size. In Sky Index the limit is 255 characters per field, which cannot be changed; I have never needed to exceed this.

Number of indexes open

In Cindex, you can have as many indexes open as your computer's memory will permit, and can move easily between them. This is essential if you are preparing several indexes to a single publication (such as an author index and a subject index). You can size and position each within the Cindex window, or choose between cascading and tiling them. Records are easily copied and pasted or dragged between indexes, though copying parts of a record is too difficult to be feasible in most instances.

In Sky Index you can have only one index open at a time. You can, however, open as many instances of Sky Index as you choose, sizing, positioning and tiling or cascading them using standard Windows commands, and you can copy and paste records, text and cells between the indexes (though you can't drag them). I personally dislike this approach: screen real estate is taken up by duplicated title bar, menu bar and other bars such as those containing icons, macros, abbreviations and status (though these can be turned off). In practice, however, the two approaches work equally well.

Voice recognition

I am assured that both programs work well with Dragon Naturally Speaking, but I have not tested either of them with this product.

Conclusion

For compiling an ordinary index, both products are pretty evenly matched. If the index contains much repetition, Sky Index is superior because of its more flexible auto-entry facility, the ease of setting up acronyms, and the ability to drag-and-drop within the index. I prefer the flexibility of the grid structure over the confines of the "index card" approach, but this is purely personal — others may feel more comfortable with the familiar card metaphor.

Editing

For both programs, editing is virtually a variation of adding records.

Proofing

Both programs let you sort records in order of entry or page number and print them out for proofing.

Navigating

Both programs assign a unique record number to each index record. The record number is a boon if you're correcting the initial proof in entry order, if your printed draft is in an order different from that on the screen, or if the entries to be corrected are any distance from each other.

In Cindex, the numbers are displayed in "draft" and "unformatted" view (but not in "formatted" view), and the display can be switched on or off with a mouse click. You call up a record for editing by typing the record number or the first few letters of the heading, or you invoke a "Go to" dialogue box in which you enter the opening letters of the main heading and any level of subheading. A highlighting bar snaps to the record, and you press the Enter key or double-click the highlighting bar to open the "index card" with the entry ready for editing.

Getting to records in Sky Index is marginally more cumbersome than in Cindex, in that you must call up a "Go to" dialogue box (which operates exactly like Cindex's). The record numbers don't appear on screen, so when I am correcting my initial proofs in entry order, I occasionally get lost. But once your cursor is at the correct record, you have the same superior flexibility as for data entry.

If your mouse has a scrolling wheel or scrolling buttons, depending on the brand of your mouse this facility works perfectly in both Cindex and Sky Index.

Find and replace

The find-and-replace function in both programs works in the same manner, in much the same way as a word-processor. Each program provides a variety of filters. At first, Cindex's system of filters seems rather daunting, but is packed with features: it is possible to find any combination of text and attributes and replace them with any other. Sky Index displays how text will look after a replacement *before* it replaces it, unlike Cindex.

Both programs feature pattern matching, long a valued but very complicated feature of Cindex. Sky Index's matching "criteria codes" are more extensive than Cindex's, and quite a lot easier to use, though by no means a pushover.

Both programs let you group and display found records in a variety of orders. Cindex lets you store the group for future reference; in Sky Index you can store search filter parameters.

Groups

Both programs let you specify and save named groups. Cindex lets you name and save any collection of records regardless of how you created it. In Sky Index, however, you can only name and save as a group those entries which have been gathered by the "Named Groups" process, which means that you must decide that you want to save them as a group *before* you create the group. So retrieving groups in a large index can take the computer quite a few seconds.

You can create "sub-indexes" from grouped records equally easily in both programs, though the methods of doing so are somewhat different.

In Cindex you can find records that fall within a range, whether this range is text, record number or whatever. In Sky Index it is a drawback that you cannot retrieve a record by page number if that number falls within a range; for example a search for page 271 will not retrieve 270–272.

Selecting records

In both programs you can create groups of records and carry out editing functions on them as a block. Sky Index is far more versatile in the number and types of processes that can be carried out on a block of records. Moreover, in Sky Index you can form a group from non-contiguous records simply by selecting them with your mouse, whereas in Cindex the records must be contiguous.

Duplicating records

Duplicating single records and blocks of records for double-posting is very easy in both programs. Duplicating and/or "flipping" the elements of a record is just a matter of a keystroke or two; both can adjust capitalisation automatically. When you "flip" a record in Sky Index that contains a subdivision that begins or ends with a preposition, the preposition is automatically relocated correctly (e.g. if you flip "education: in Queensland" you get "Queensland: education in").

To duplicate a block of entries, you highlight it with the mouse and select "duplicate" from the menu.

Splitting and joining

In both programs, it is easy to split existing headings into headings with subheadings, and to join subheadings to headings. It is possible to carry out this operation on several records simultaneously, though in both systems it is a two-step process. Both systems let you join all solo subheadings to their headings in a single global operation.

Conclusion

Records are easier to target in Cindex. However, the need to carry out editing within the "index card" box can be very restrictive. Copying text can be so tiresome that it's often easier to retype it. For me, the flexibility of Sky Index's ability to move text easily between cells outweighs Cindex's ease of locating records.

Sorting

Both programs let you sort word-by-word or letter-by-letter, or in ASCII sort order. It is easy to choose the order and to change it at any time. They let you choose whether to sort numbers or ignore them.

Sky Index allows for Chicago Manual of Style rules for both word-by-word and letter-by-letter (evidently a requirement for the US Department of Agriculture correspondence course in indexing, popular in the US), in addition to ISO rules, bringing the total of choices to five. Cindex has three

choices, and it is not clear whether these are CMS or ISO rules; version 1.5 adds an "Exceptions" box that allows you to configure your index to follow these any variation of these rules.

Sky Index gives the indexer total control over date sorting. You can customise year abbreviations so that 98 and 99 file *before* 00 and 01. Months as subheadings file in correct order without the need for sort overrides. This is invaluable when indexing newspapers or news magazines (though I did have a bit of difficulty with one Brian May, whom Sky Index insisted on filing before June!).

Both programs allow you to force the sorting order of particular entries or terms, by inserting codes that identify text as printed but not sorted, or sorted but not printed.

Both programs ship with a list of prepositions that are ignored in sorting when they appear as the first word of a subheading. The list can be amended or deleted for all new indexes or for the current index only.

Cindex lets you sort subheadings at any level in page number order, without affecting the order of other levels.

Index management

Setting defaults

Both programs ship with certain pre-set defaults, which apply to all new indexes. It is easy to change these defaults. In Cindex, you close or minimize all indexes, and then change the settings. In Sky Index, you create a new index named "default" (or if you have already created one, you open it), and change the settings.

Templates

Both programs allow you to import the format of other indexes. Sky Index imports data entry options such as acronyms and macros, and output formatting options. Cindex lets you set up and save as separate files both templates and style sheets that can be used by other indexes. I must confess to initially being baffled by Cindex's distinction between templates and style sheets; it seems that one contains the other.

Importing and exporting indexes

If you are working in collaboration with other indexers, you will probably need to exchange index files. You can import records prepared in other software products, such as text editors or database programs, as text delimited files or a variety of formats. In addition, Cindex can import backup files made by Macrex; and Sky Index can import backup files made by Cindex and Macrex.

From Sky Index you can export text delimited files containing sort override and text formatting code for use by both Cindex and Macrex, though this is not described in the documentation.

Checking spelling

Cindex comes with an English spelling dictionary. You can buy dictionaries for other languages, or dictionaries of specialist terms such as legal and medical terminology. You can also create your own supplementary dictionary.

Sky Index exports your index in text delimited form to your word-processor for checking, and reloads it after checking. The advantage of this is you need to maintain only one set of spelling dictionaries on your computer for all your work, instead of one for word-processing and another for indexing.

Backing up

Backing up indexes is easy in both programs. Cindex allows you choose to back up as an exact copy or as a compact "archive" file. Alternatively, both programs let you save the data alone as a delimited text file.

Error trapping

Both programs can check your index for errors, either on the fly or as a batch process.

Statistics generation

Both programs provide statistical information on your index, such as number of records, size of records, number of page references, the number of lines in the formatted index, and the cumulated time the index has been open.

Merging indexes

Merging indexes is easy. In Cindex, you simply open both indexes, choose "Select all" for one and drag its entries into the other. In Sky Index, you open the receiving index, choose "Merge index" and then the name of the index to be merged.

In Cindex, you can also merge *parts* of index with another index, simply by dragging selected or grouped records into another index.

Multi-volume works, works in parts, and periodicals

Both programs help you prepare indexes to multi-volume works, works that are issued in parts, periodicals, loose-leaf services and other material that is issued over a period.

Both programs keep track of volume and chapter numbers, let you manipulate them independently of page numbers, allow you to display the index entries for a single volume or chapter on the screen, and provide a variety of options for displaying volume and chapter numbers in the final index. In Sky Index you can import auto-entry data from other indexes.

Macros

Macros let you combine a long or complex series of operations into a single operation. Recording a macro in Cindex is easy. You choose "Record events" and perform the keystrokes and/or mouse movements you want recorded. To invoke the macro at any time, you choose "Play events". You can have up to 10 macros, all by simply recording a series of keystrokes and/or mouse movements. However, to play them back you must choose "Play events" from the "Tools" menu, and then choose the macro from a sub-menu identifying macros merely as "Macro 1", "Macro 2" etc. (remembering which of 10 unidentified macros does what could be a challenging task in itself). Alternatively, of course, you can press the sequence of keys corresponding to the Menu bar "Alt" shortcuts.

Sky Index allows you to store up to 20 macros, invoked by pressing one of the function keys on the keyboard, clearly labelled on the screen display. Setting them is up more complicated though, and you

must use a simple programming language. For very complex operations this can mean careful planning and debugging.

Syndetic structure

Cross-references

The programs treat cross-references in a very similar manner — in my view, rather inadequately. You type cross-references in the subheading or page-reference field, preceded by "see" or "see also", and the program recognises them as cross-references and formats them appropriately. Both programs let you specify the terms you intend to use for cross-references, so that you can use foreign-language equivalents. Getting non-standard terminology (like "see also earlier form of name") to format correctly is a bit of a struggle. Both provide checking mechanisms to pick up blind or circular references; Sky Index can check that a cross-reference is valid as soon as you enter it. Both can handle cross-references containing terms that are not identical to the heading; for example, they can accept "ABC *see* Australian Broadcasting Corporation" as a valid cross-reference to "Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC)"; you can if you wish set Cindex to recognise only exact matches.

Cross-reference formats can be specified separately for headings and subheadings, in both programs. As well as allowing placement of "see also" cross-references as the first or last subheading, Cindex allows them to follow on directly from the heading, in one of two formats.

Authority control

Authority control leaves a lot to be desired in both programs. Cindex can display a list of terms without page references, listing under each term any "see" or "see also" cross-references that point to it.. But this list must be generated each time you want to consult it, and although you can print it out you can't save it as a separate file to use as an authority list for future indexes. Sky Index can be set to notify you whenever you enter a term not already in the "auto entry" list.

In both programs it is *possible* to create authority lists which you can print out and save as a separate file; it is *possible* to embed in an entry authority information on cross-references made to it; it is *possible* to load an authority list you have created as the basis for a new index and then delete unused headings. But none of these are documented anywhere; it is difficult to work out how to perform them, and very time-consuming to carry them out.

Cindex does have one important authority control feature. By setting up a "reference index" consisting of headings and cross-references only, you can generate cross-references in another index automatically. Using this tool you can create and maintain an authority file for an index to a serial, and create the required cross-references automatically each time an index is issued. Cindex decides in each case whether a reference should be "see" or "see also"; although I discovered that this was not infallible, a quick manual edit tidied up any problems. Since creating an authority file, though theoretically possible, is messy and time-consuming, perhaps a future version of Cindex could have as a partner to its "Create Cross-References" a "Create Reference Index" tool.

Formatting

Formatting your final index is the third area where the greatest differences between the programs are visible.

In Sky Index, you can choose between set-out format for all levels of subheading, and run-on for a single level of subheading. You can choose among several formats for page-range sequences, the punctuation of page references, and the format of cross-references

The formatting options in Cindex appear almost infinite. The range of options and their combinations is so vast that choosing the correct combination of settings can take some time, but it's difficult to think of a format that can't be achieved somehow.

In brief, Sky Index provides formatting for most indexes produced by most indexers. Cindex provides any format that I can imagine anyone ever needing.

For example, I have indexed a number of political and critical biographies. For these, an appropriate format for the entries for major characters is set-out subheadings arranged in alphabetical order with subsubheadings run-on in chronological order (often the same as page-number order). It is possible to achieve this format in Cindex after a little experimentation, and very handsome it looks too. In Sky Index, it is impossible.

Cindex displays your index in exactly the typeface, type size, column-width etc. that it will print out. You may find this useful — I don't.

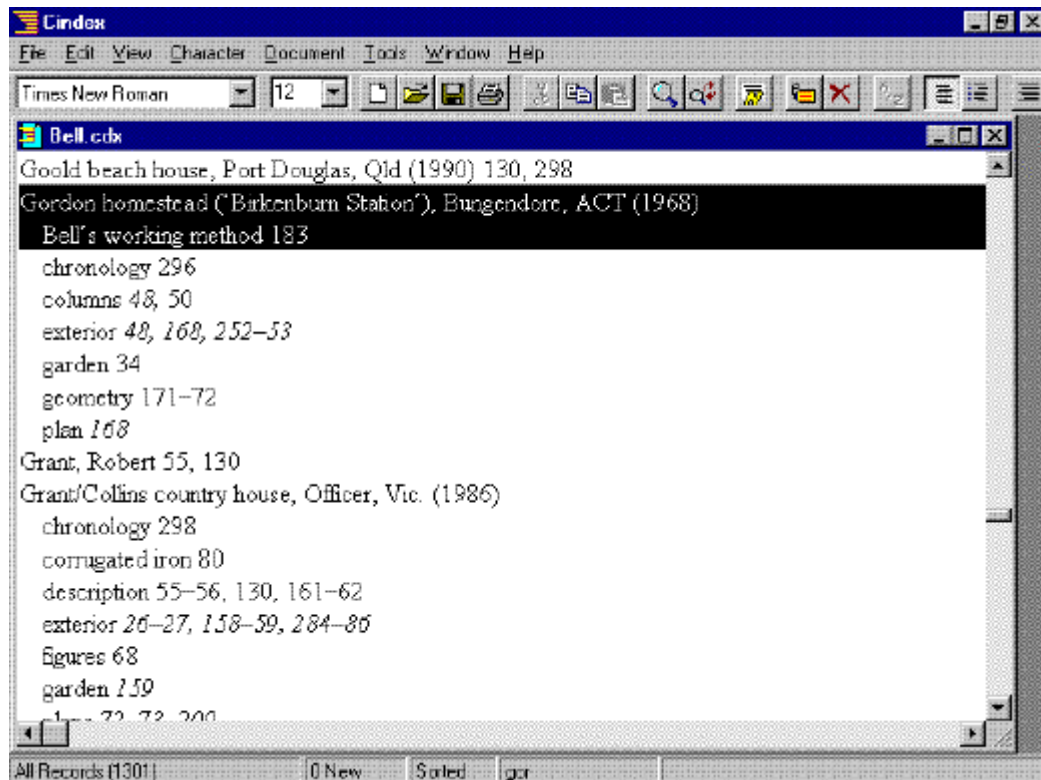
Output

Both programs can produce printed and machine-readable output in a variety of formats.

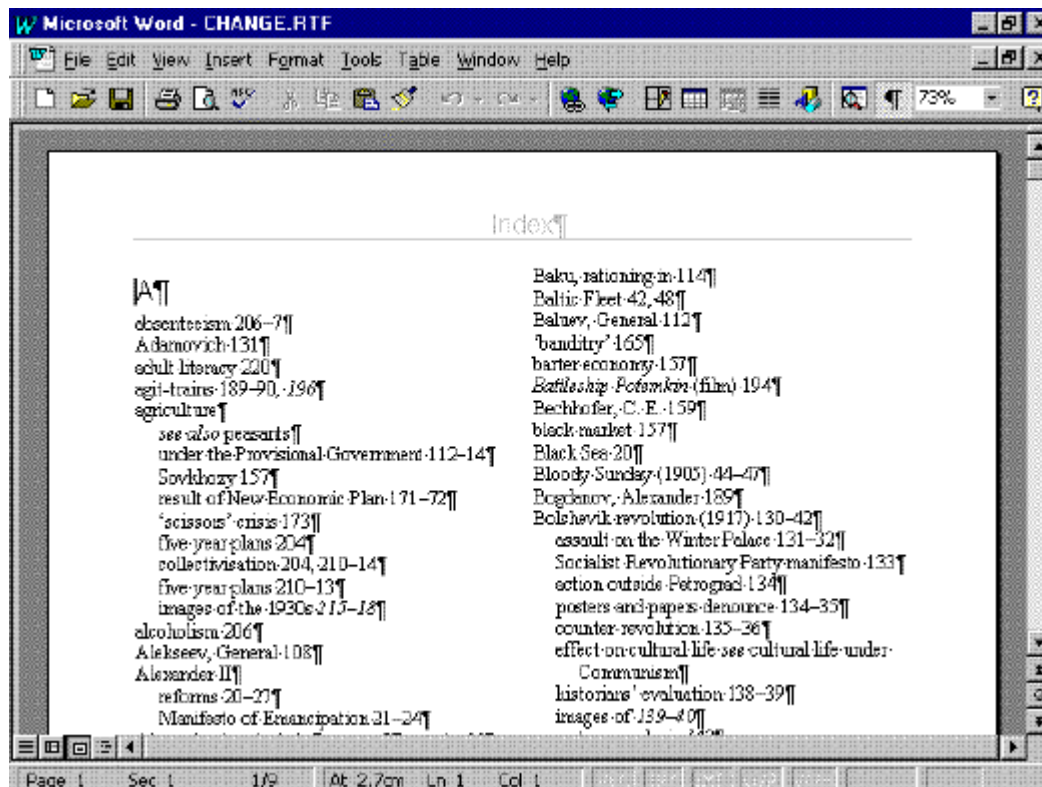
Printing out

A variety of options can be set in both programs. Although the dialogue boxes look very different, they both do approximately the same things. Sky Index's dialogue boxes display a preview of the effect of each setting.

When you print from Cindex, what is sent to the printer is exactly the view displayed on screen. To produce a printout for proofing, you choose to display "draft" or "unformatted" view, choose "unsorted", and then click the "print" icon or choose "File|Print" from the menu. To print the final version, you ensure that the various formatting options are set so that the screen displays as you want the printed version to appear, and then choose "formatted" view and "unsorted", and print it as before. All very straightforward.



Sky Index takes a different approach altogether, based on the probability that you already own and are familiar with a word-processor. To produce a printout for proofing, you ensure the Entry grid is displayed in entry order or page number order and choose "Proofing report" from the menu. The contents of the grid are printed in the order of the grid's display. To print the final version, you set the formatting options, only some of which appear in the Preview panel. When you click the "print" icon, Sky Index generates the index, opens your favourite word-processor and loads the index in the format you have chosen. (Eight standard word-processors are supported directly, but you can use any word-processor that can read RTF files.) At this stage you can print the index, inspect it, and within the word-processor carry out any fine-tuning not possible from within Sky Index. It sounds complex and messy, but in fact it's dead easy and totally hassle-free, and has the added advantage that you can see exactly what your client will see.



Printing sub-indexes

Now here we have one of Cindex's two breathtaking features. You can select any number of records (from one to all) on the Cindex screen, drag them to a word-processing program and there they are, perfectly formatted. I couldn't believe my eyes! Imagine the possibilities. Using Cindex's sophisticated grouping feature, you can create a sub-index using just about any criteria you please, and drag it fully featured to a word-processor. You want an index to Volume 2 only? No problem. Entries for 1997 issues only? Easy-peasy. Click. Drag. Done.

Sky Index has a similar feature which, although less spectacular, works equally well. When you generate an index or send it to your word-processor, Sky Index incorporates only those records displayed in the Edit grid. You select the group just as you would in Cindex, but instead of opening your word-processor and dragging the records to it, you click the "Print" icon and the word-processor opens with the sub-index displayed.

Machine-readable output

Now that almost all our clients require us to send out indexes in machine-readable form, this has become a more important issue than the form of the printed output.

To produce files for use by clients, in Cindex you use the "save as" function, and save your index as rich text format (RTF); plain ASCII text files with or without line breaks; text files containing tags for Quark Xpress, AAP, University of Chicago or HTML; or defining a custom tagging system. Unlike the DOS version, Cindex for Windows' Quark Xpress files incorporate style tag definitions so that the client is no longer obliged to define the attributes before loading the file.

In Sky Index, you "generate" your index after choosing the output format from RTF (with the choice of indicating levels with styles, tabs, or spaces), Chicago, ANSI/NISO, text (ASCII), HTML, Quark XPress, or custom (all with or without line breaks). Cindex outputs are text only (with or without line breaks), RTF, Quark XPress, AAP tagged text, HTML, and UCP tagged text. (I have no idea what

some of these are, but I offer you the information in the hope that it makes sense to you.) All output formats in both can be customised to a certain extent.

You can save customised tagging schemes for use in other indexes in Cindex. To reuse a customised tagging scheme in Sky Index you have to import the entire index configuration.

Embedding entries in other documents

And here is Cindex's other amazing feature. Having created your index, you can drag individual entries into RTF-compatible word-processors (such as Word), embedding the entry into the text for generation within the word-processor. The entries incorporate:

formatting of page references — bold, italic, underline etc.

page spans

formatted cross-references

sort keys ensuring entries will sort in the same order as the Cindex-produced index.

You can also drag the index terms into desktop publishing software such as Ventura Publisher, so if you possess the same desktop publishing package that your client is using to typeset the document, or if you are working with Cindex in-house, you can drag the terms directly into the typeset document. It is unfortunate that the desktop publishing software rapidly becoming the software of choice for Australian designers, Quark Xpress, is severely limited when it comes to importing text, and cannot translate the embedded index terms for use within Quark Xpress. I do not know whether other packages such as PageMaker, FrameMaker or Microsoft Publisher can do so, but if they support full the RTF specifications then they will be able to.

This is still along way from the interactive workspace envisaged by Mulvany (*Indexing Books* , 1994, pp. 277–278). It is still necessary to create and edit the index apart from the text being indexed, embedding the terms in the word-processing document as the final act. But it is a great leap forward and the best we have.

Announced on the Sky Software Web site is a product in preparation called "Sky Index with Embedding". According to the description this will allow you to work on your index as you are embedding the terms in the document, editing and modifying existing entries as you go. Perhaps this will take us closer to Mulvany's vision.

Documentation

Both programs have good online and printed documentation.

Online help

The online help of both programs is context-sensitive. Because Cindex's features are so comprehensive the explanations can be overwhelming, but they are clearly written. Illustrations of the features being described would make the explanations easier to follow. Many help screens are very long, and you have to scroll extensively to read them. Excellent use is made of the Windows 95 "What is?" interactive help feature.

Sky Index's help is well-designed and easy to use. The information is digestibly "chunked" into shortish screens. Longer screens begin with a summary containing hyperlinks to sections within the

screen. The help facility is heavily illustrated; you can click on part of an illustration of the menu bar or a dialogue box for an excellent explanation of how to use it. You have to have some idea where to look first, and it is possible to get lost. An online tutorial introducing you to the basic concepts encourages you to get up and running right away. Right-clicking on a toolbar icon, or pressing the F1 key with a menu item highlighted, brings up help on how to use it. When you open Sky Index, a "Tip of the Day" appears (it can be disabled if you wish) — a very useful device when you're still learning how to use the program.

Printed manuals

Cindex's manual covers absolutely everything in great detail. Although all the basic information you need to know is covered early in the manual, there is no introductory tutorial, so getting started on your first index can be frustrating. Because of the detailed explanations and many illustrated examples, it is possible to read and understand the manual without actually having Cindex running on your computer. But as a result (I'm afraid to say) it can be difficult to find what you're looking for in the incredibly detailed index!

Sky Index's manual, while fairly comprehensive, does not repeat information you can see by looking at the screen. This makes it simpler to use, but unlike the Cindex manual, for it to be really useful you need to have Sky Index actually running on your computer. I have discovered a few undocumented features, so if something's not in the manual it doesn't mean you can't do it. A whole chapter is devoted to a tutorial, making it very easy to be productive right away.

Customer service

The prompt, courteous and unfailingly helpful service from both suppliers is nothing short of astounding! Would that Microsoft could study their ways, and learn.

Frequent updates of both products are available free to registered users via the Internet.

Buying software

Price

The price of both programs is similar, but actual prices vary depending on discounts, upgrades and cross-grades. Don't make your decision on the basis of price alone. As a professional indexer, the software you use is your income-generator. If you are indexing full-time, even at full price each of these products costs less than a week's income and is tax-deductible, and you can expect it to pay for itself in a matter of weeks. The investment in the time it takes to become fully proficient in either of them is a greater cost than the cash outlay, so choose on the basis of what you need and what you feel most comfortable with.

Student editions are available for both products at vastly reduced prices. These are identical to the full product but are restricted to the number of entries required for the US Department of Agriculture correspondence course.

Both Cindex and Sky Index have a host of other great features that I don't have room to describe here. You can download demonstration versions of both programs for free. Play with them both until you are confident which one suits you best.

For information on pricing or to download a demonstration version, visit the Web sites:

Cindex: <http://www.indexres.com>

Sky Index: <http://www.sky-software.com>

The future

Sky Index version 6.0 will be released in the near future. Like Cindex, it will be a 32-bit program and will incorporate the features of such programs.

Choosing which to buy

Which system you choose depends on what your requirements are. Various versions of Cindex are already used widely, particularly in New South Wales, so if you often collaborate with others you will probably find that Cindex files are more acceptable. The power of Cindex is phenomenal: whatever you want to do, there will be a way to do it in Cindex. But the speed of data entry and editing in Sky Index are clearly superior.

If you work with a wide range of material in a variety of formats, or collaborate with a variety of other indexers, and functionality and flexibility are more important to you than the speed of data entry and editing, I recommend Cindex.

If you work on your own or in a static team, chiefly with a limited range of material with straightforward formatting requirements, and speed of data entry and editing is of primary importance, I recommend Sky Index.

Which do I use? Well, I have both, and I use them both. For most indexes I use Sky Index, because I am a slow typist and the extra speed it provides is important to me. On the other hand, I index a wide range of material, some of whose indexes require sophisticated formatting, and for these I use Cindex. I also use Cindex when collaborating with others. Sometimes I have had a huge index with a lot of repetition and complex formatting requirements; on these occasions I have entered and edited the data in Sky Index, and then exported it to Cindex for formatting. However, unless collecting indexing software is an interest of yours, I don't recommend this solution to anyone – not only is the cost doubled, but so is the time required to acquire and maintain operating skills.

Table of comparisons

x not available

l adequate

ll good

lll excellent

Clearly some of these features are more important than others.

	Cindex	Sky Index
Presentation	lll	lll
Viewing records	lll	ll
Data entry	ll	lll
Keyboard shortcuts	ll	lll
Special characters	lll	lll

Subheadings	111	III
Page references	11	III
Provisional page references	11	111
Multi-volume works	11	11
Record size	11	11
Multiple indexes	11	x
Editing	11	111
Proofing report	11	11
Navigation	111	11
Find and replace	111	11
Duplicating and flipping	111	111
Splitting and joining	111	111
Sorting	111	111
Multi-volume works	11	11
Setting defaults	11	11
Templates	11	11
Importing and exporting indexes	11	111
Spell check	11	11
Backing up	11	11
Error trapping	11	11
Statistics generation	11	11
Merging indexes	111	11
Setting macros	111	1
Number of macros	11	111
Cross-reference management	111	11
Authority control	11	1

Formatting	111	1
Printing out	11	11
Machine-readable output	11	11
Online help	111	111
Manual	11	11
Tutorial	x	11
Customer service	111	111
Overall value	111	111