

# Around the world

*Edited by Glenda Browne*

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The focus of this issue of *Around the World* is reports on the SI and CSI conferences, along with a discussion of social networking for indexers.

## Social networking for indexers

The special topic for this issue is social networking for indexers – exploring how and where we network electronically, and what the results are.

Social networking describes the process by which people build online networks of contacts and interact with these people as individuals and in groups. It ranges from largely social contact on sites such as Facebook to largely professional contact on sites such as LinkedIn. It can be time-consuming to keep up with all your contacts, and the rewards are variable, although it can be a good way to promote indexing services and the indexing profession.

To find out what indexers do I asked the international representatives for *The Indexer*, as well as posting messages on Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook and Ning.

### Twitter

Twitter (<http://twitter.com>) is like an instant messaging service. You write entries (called ‘tweets’) on the Web or on your mobile phone, and they are sent instantly to all your ‘followers’. Messages have a maximum length of 140 characters. People like Twitter because it is quick and simple.

Twitter was designed as a way of keeping people updated with your daily movements, but is now also used as a way of updating people about work-related information including news and URLs of interest.

Given that much of Twitter is ‘babble’, I was interested that the first reply I had to my query was from Stuart Hughes on the use of Twitter to let people know about content being indexed by Cunningham Library at the Australian Council for Educational Research for the IDP Database of Research on International Education ([http://www.idp.com/research/database\\_of\\_research.aspx](http://www.idp.com/research/database_of_research.aspx)). The Database is updated monthly, and indexers keep people informed about new publications between updates via Twitter. Sometimes the indexers send the text to their home email, so that they can tweet from home before they go to bed, giving the Database’s tweets a presence in peak hour in other time zones.

Aside from the quick tweet itself, Stuart says ‘the only other work is a bit of time spent hunting out relevant people and organisations in the international education industry to follow (you have to follow to get followers) and blocking the occasional scantily clad follower that shows up with clearly no interest in international education’.

Lots of people find that they get useful information from

Twitter. For example, James Lamb tweeted the URL of his comprehensive advice on doing complex searches on Twitter (<http://ccgi.jalamb.com/2009/08/using-the-twitter-search-box>). Thérèse Shere said that ‘every one of my publisher clients has a Twitter presence . . . and it gives me an idea of what they’re thinking about, upcoming releases, and so on.’ Some societies also tweet, for example the NSW Society of Editors (<http://twitter.com/SocEdNSW>). People tweeted during the ASI conference, and we are hoping to set up some sort of Twitter page for ANZSI2009 when we work out how!

Jan Wright commented that she finds the tweets of people in the technical documentation world quite useful as they often link to great articles and postings. It’s like mini-blogging for them, and it saves her having to go to ten websites.

Debbie Olson sends out tweets advertising her business and projects she is working on, as well as promoting indexing in general by referring to indexing organizations. She tries to use hash tags<sup>1</sup> for indexing terms within her posts, and searches indexing-related terms and sends responses to others who mention indexing in their tweets.

Seth Maislin has started sending a #dailyentry tweet, in which he posts one of his index entries, and other indexers have followed suit. Seth also noticed that when he posts something with a particular word in it, he ends up with followers based on that word. For example, he posted ‘Sudoku history,’ and someone interested in Sudoku started following.

Paula Unger writes ‘I enjoy following indexers on Twitter and look forward to making my first “daily entry” post. It’s fun, fast, and helps maintain a connection among indexers.’

An interesting use is described by Charlie Rapple, a contributor to the ALPSP<sup>2</sup> discussion group, who writes that he finds Twitter ‘very useful at Conferences, not only for sharing quick notes about the papers but also for engaging in discussion with other Tweeters during presentations. It’s like being able to whisper at the back of class – anything from “what was that citation I just missed?” to “what’s he on about?” It enriches the experience, with Tweeters posting additional thoughts and related links that complement the content.’ Neither of our reporters on the recent SI Conference picked up on this phenomenon, and it seems that the only tweeters at the recent ANZSI conference were members of the social networking panel. There were also a few tweets of support from overseas indexers.

Twellow is a Twitter directory, and it has a category for ‘Indexing’ (following recommendations by a few early adopters).

### LinkedIn

LinkedIn ([www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com)) is a networking site with a professional focus – a bit like a business version of Facebook.

Rossinna Ippolito noted that LinkedIn is pretty slow, and I have found this to be its biggest disadvantage.

Ed Rush commented, 'I'm in LinkedIn and Facebook, but haven't gotten more than social benefit from either,' and Jan Wright noted, 'I use LinkedIn to link up to everyone workwise, but don't find that it generates much business,' although she added, 'There is an active discussion group on ebooks, and one for the New Mexico tech writers, so there are some discussions coming out of it that are useful.' Susan Nedrow says she has 'joined a number of the publishing-related groups here, and I've found the exchange of ideas interesting. As a result of posts to those groups, I've corresponded with some potential clients, but I've not yet received projects. I suspect that, as with other groups in which I participate, some projects might come with time.'

Pilar Wyman has had more positive experiences, with work coming through LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook, and said, 'Wherever the clients are, that's where I think we need to be, too.'

Who can you connect with on LinkedIn? To some extent effective use of LinkedIn requires you already to have a network. Tracy Wilson Burns says 'I am not using either LinkedIn or Facebook for social networking with indexers, because I am new to indexing and still in the very early stages of building a social network. I hope as I become more involved in indexing that will change.' Tracy also uses LinkedIn 'for tracking down friends and previous co-workers with whom I've lost touch over the years. Once I locate them on LinkedIn, I socialize with them offline, via email or through Facebook.'

Kerry Biram commented, 'One advantage is that you can view the other contacts of your own contacts, and ask to be referred to someone if you feel there's a possible benefit in getting in contact about an area of work or research.' In addition, LinkedIn presents you with suggestions of people you might know, based on mutual connections or shared groups. By making connections in this way your network can grow quickly.

Penny Fletcher says, 'I love LinkedIn for networking but am very selective in my choices for link-ups.' Debbie Olson agrees: 'I try mainly to connect with someone I've worked with in some capacity before, e.g. on a project or on a committee. Sometimes this can be difficult and your connections can grow pretty fast and you can easily end up with a group of people you really don't know. This may be fine in some cases (Twitter) but perhaps less so in others (LinkedIn). On the other hand, I have also met indexers through these sites with whom I now communicate with on a day-to-day basis.'

One of the valuable features of LinkedIn is the groups through which you can connect with people who share your interests. You can find relevant groups by keyword searching, or seeing what groups your connections belong to. You then ask to join, and are usually accepted within a few days. The groups are in serious need of rationalization. Publishing-related groups include:

- Authors, Writers, Publishers, Editors, and other Professionals
- Publishing and editing professionals

- Book Publishing professionals
- Digital Publishing Network
- Write It Down – A Website for Writers
- Indexing.

There are many more.

It is good for our indexing societies to have a voice in these groups. For example, on 26 August 2009 someone wrote, 'Looking for a highly qualified professional indexer for my second book,' and received the reply, an hour later, 'I suggest posting your need on the Editorial Freelancers Association JobList at [www.the-efa.org](http://www.the-efa.org). It's fast, free, and targeted – lots of experienced indexers are members.' At other times on LinkedIn people have recommended ANZSI and ASI as well.

Kerry Biram notes that 'With the Groups feature, it's easy to spread the word about a proposal or work-related question and get responses from a wider group of colleagues than just our own Australian indexing contacts.'

I sent my request for information for this article to a number of LinkedIn groups.

### Facebook

Facebook ([www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)) is like a personal version of LinkedIn, and indexers use it mainly to connect with family and friends, rather than with colleagues and clients. Debbie Olson wrote, 'I use Twitter, LinkedIn, Indexer's Network, Delicious and LibraryThing for professional networking and Facebook for personal connections.' Jan Wright notes, 'Facebook I keep very, very private, only close friends and family. I don't see it as a work-related site.' Thérèse Shere said she disliked all of the games and apps on Facebook, which get in the way of things that interest her.

Tracy Wilson Burns comments, 'I do use Facebook for social networking in general, and find that it provides a nice escape for social breaks throughout the day, when I'm working from home-alone. So while I'm not yet Facebooking with other indexers, the social networking helps me retain a sense of belonging to a group – something I miss from the corporate day job I used to have.'

People who have professional and personal connections on Facebook say they have started to self-censor what they write to be appropriate to all their readers. Others have started 'de-friending' professional contacts from Facebook so they can keep the two groups separate. Debbie Olson comments, 'It's not the most graceful of maneuvers to 'defriend' someone, but I sent each a personal message explaining what I was doing and that I would like to connect with them professionally on Twitter, LinkedIn, or the Indexer's Network instead. Also, you can bring together a variety of your social networking via Facebook so I have my Tweets, Delicious, LibraryThing, and LinkedIn profile appearing in the 'Boxes' section of my FB site. If my more personal friends are interested in my professional life they can go there for updates.'

While Facebook is in general more for personal contacts, I have found it to be a good home for information about *The indexing companion workbook*, as you can create a page for a product, and then invite 'fans' to join.

## Ning

Ning – The Indexers' Network (<http://indexing.ning.com>) is a social/professional networking site specifically for indexers, set up by Jan Wright. It is like a collection of mailing lists, providing a general comment area as well as a large number of groups. It is more personal than a traditional mailing list as personal information and photographs can be added. Answering questions there is a good way to connect with other indexers. Jan says she is getting disappointed by Ning's slowness to update their features, and is waiting to see what Google Wave might offer (<http://wave.google.com>).

Any member can add a new group on Ning. Current groups include:

- Kids and indexing
- Textbooks
- Index Students
- Engineering and math indexers.

At the 'Canadian, eh?' group, for example, they discuss local issues such as whether Canadian indexers also work for US publishers and what conferences are of value, and also establish local connections.

Rossinna Ippolito thinks, 'The best social network for indexing is Jan Wright's Ning. I started a newbies group there and we have made good, very helpful connections.' Thérèse Shere says, 'I like the Ning network, just don't seem to get there very often. I hereby vow to visit every couple of days.' Janyne Ste Marie says she hasn't got work through Ning, although she does 'get into the occasional discussion of cats'. Paula Unger likes the mixed content, saying, 'I very much enjoy this site [Ning], which covers both the serious issues we face as well as the whimsy.'

## Other options

As well as the sites I asked about, I got some information on other services that indexers use.

Gunter Swoboda replied that he is on Plaxo, a site similar to LinkedIn with an address book service and a way of linking to all your other networking sites.

Debbie Olson uses Delicious, 'not so much for networking as a way to share information about indexing with my peers and authors.' I collect URLs of website indexes of all types and quality ([http://delicious.com/GlendaIndexer/website\\_indexes](http://delicious.com/GlendaIndexer/website_indexes)), and find that providing the Delicious details to be a quick and easy way to share these URLs.

A number of indexers use LibraryThing ([www.librarything.com](http://www.librarything.com)) and Shelfari (<https://www.shelfari.com>), which are book listing sites. Debbie Olson says of LibraryThing, 'There is a "networking" component here but I mainly use it to organize and catalog books in my professional library . . . I'm sharing my resources with others and advertising that I have made a professional investment in my freelancing business. It's also a way of promoting indexing publications.'

Suzi Kaplan writes, 'There is a group on LibraryThing called "Indexers Who LibraryThing". They have started

adding the job title, Indexer, and the name of the individual book indexer if known' Some group members have also suggested adding the tag 'indexed by me'.

Shelfari is owned by Amazon. It is similar to Library Thing, but as of 8 September 2009 there were only two 'Indexers who Shelfari'. Anyone promoting a book can join the 'Shameless-Self-Promotion' group here.

Mary Russell writes, 'The ANZSI Council has been using the discussion feature of the ANZSI website to share comments on the Council Minutes. The Council members and discussion topics are tagged to only be visible to Council members. This has proved successful and reduced the number of emails being circulated amongst Council members and the work of the Secretary.'

There may be more emphasis on face-to-face social activity in Germany, as Jochen Fassbender writes, 'We have no mailing lists, blogs (which are very uncommon in Germany, not to mention for German indexers), etc. In fact, the only time DNI members do some social networking is at the DNI annual meeting in Frankfurt.'

## Conclusion

For the indexers who use these sites, escaping the isolation of the freelance indexer and connecting broadly with colleagues and clients are the key motivations.

Kerry Biram says, 'I've always thought that for freelance indexers (and editors), networking of any type is vital to maintain and develop a list of clients, and to keep in contact with other colleagues. Most of us work from home in isolation, so finding ways of staying in touch and sharing professional information is very important. We'll all have our own preferred ways of doing that, whether it's by attending meetings, phone, email, Twitter, Facebook, or other means.'

Tracy Wilson Burns comments, 'While I don't use Facebook and LinkedIn for social networking with indexers yet, the professional networking via the email groups with ASI-L, my local chapter, and SIGs, provides a sense of belonging and makes me feel less isolated while I work from home. The purpose of those email lists is for professional communication – but there are social results from being plugged into that.'

For many, these sites have supplemented rather than replaced older options. Debbie Olson writes, 'Indexing organizations, lists, chapters and SIGs are still an important part of the overall networking tools too.'

One problem with these sites, especially in what may turn out to be a transition period, is the duplication of activity. You may be reading the same posts on Twitter and Facebook, and if you want to ask a question about indexing, you have to decide whether to go to the relevant group on Ning, to a specific mailing list, or to a general mailing list such as Index-L. Some will go to all, some will be selective. In future we may find that much of what we need can be gathered in one source with a tool such as Ning, into which we can dip as much or as little as we like.