Indexing the Montgomery Ward Catalogue*

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Many of you are familiar with Montgomery Ward's catalogue; but, for those of you who are not, I will briefly outline our catalogue programme. Through our catalogues we sell an exceptionally broad variety of general merchandise for the family and home. We offer practically all types of merchandise sold in a typical department store, but, in addition to this type of merchandise, we sell a complete line of plumbing and heating equipment, lawn, garden and farm equipment, automotive parts and supplies, major appliances and more. Originally, all of our catalogue orders were received by mail. Today mail orders constitute the smallest segment of our business. The bulk of our orders are received by phone or in person at one of our more than 1,300 catalogue outlets. The entire total of our orders, which is nearing the one billion dollar sales mark, is generated by the sixteen catalogues we print each year.

For each of the major seasonal periods, Spring/Summer and Fall/Winter, we publish a large 1,200 to 1,300-page full assortment general catalogue. In addition to each of these general catalogues we issue twelve sale catalogues, a Christmas catalogue and a Suburban, Farm, and Garden Catalogue. These smaller catalogues contain from ninety-six to 400 pages each and are very easily indexed, so I will confine my remarks first to the preparation of our big general catalogue and then to the preparation of the index for it.

To begin the process of creating a general catalogue, we hold a seasonal strategy meeting at which we outline our overall merchandising approach for an entire selling season. We will review results of the past year, competitors' efforts, graphic presentation, new trends, and other factors which we feel will have a bearing on the approaching selling season.

* A paper read at the meeting of the American Society of Indexers held in Chicago on 1st May 1976.
Once this step has been completed, we are in a position to begin allocating page space. This is accomplished by holding departmental space meetings with each of our forty merchandise departments to determine which merchandise will be the most productive. Each department's plan is reviewed on a page-by-page basis and page space is allotted. A page sequence is then written and permanent page numbers are assigned to each department.

Our method of index compilation is largely contingent upon our method of page preparation. Between our Chicago and New York merchandise office we have a total of fourteen advertising units. Each is responsible for preparing the catalogue pages for a group of merchandise departments which sell merchandise of similar nature. Each comprises from three to seven copywriters under the supervision of an Advertising Manager. In total, sixty-six copywriters are involved in the preparation of approximately 1,300 general catalogue pages in addition to their work on the various supplementary catalogues.

Under our system, each copywriter is responsible for writing a specific number of catalogue pages. Of all the people involved in creating our catalogues, the copywriter is the most knowledgeable about each stage of preparation of any given page, since it is the copywriter who creates the basic pin-up of the page, prepares the art order, writes the copy and checks the page through all its proof stages right up to the final printed version. Therefore, the copywriter is responsible for compiling the index listings for each page assigned to him.

Although the entire process of creating a catalogue from strategy meeting to final distribution takes approximately eight months, we cannot begin our compilation of the index listings until we reach a point near the end of the copywriting stage.

Approximately two months prior to final printing a letter is sent to our advertising units requesting departmental index listings for each page. The letter specifies the number of pages allocated to the index, a due date, and brief guidelines. Our major concerns in preparing the index are to ensure that every item sold in the catalogue is listed and that every item can be readily located under its most common name. Each writer is instructed to be guided by his own judgement of how a customer might actually look for an item listing in the index as he makes his page-by-page review of his layout dummy book. The vast majority of items require a cross-reference of only two listings, for example, Socket Wrenches and Wrenches, Socket. Listings are typed out on special ruled index sheets, but no attempt at alphabetisation is made at this time.

Upon completion of his index sheets, the writer submits them to his Advertising Manager, who reviews them for accuracy and thoroughness, adds general entries, such as Hardware, for the departments under his jurisdiction, and submits the listings to the Index Co-ordinator.

The Index Co-ordinator then checks all index sheets submitted by the advertising units against the general catalogue page sequence to ensure that no pages have been omitted. He or she then reviews the sheets for any possible spelling or typographical errors, edits out superfluous entries, and forwards a complete set of copies to our Computer Information Processing Center. In turn, the center key-punches all listings and feeds them into an IBM 370 computer to produce an alphabetised print-out of 6,500 to 7,000 index listings. The print-out is then returned to our Index Co-ordinator, who again edits it, indicating bold-face type, ditto marks and indentations where necessary. He or she then forwards the marked-up print-out sheets to the printer so that the listings can be type-set in galley form.

Upon receipt of the galley proofs, the Index Co-ordinator submits a complete set of galleys to each of the fourteen advertising units for checking. Any corrections are returned to him or her and all are incorporated into a master galley which is then cut into page-size segments and returned to the printer, who re-sets the galleys in standard foundry proof form. These proofs are rechecked by the Index Co-ordinator and submitted to the printer for final printing.

Our ten-page index, along with fourteen pages of measuring and ordering information, is printed on yellow paper, which, though bound in the centre of the book, makes it contrast sharply from the rest of the book, which is printed on standard white paper. As additional identification, we print the beginning index page number on the front cover of the catalogue and also on the backbone of the book, where we also print an abbreviated general index. The entire indexing process takes approximately eight weeks to perform, and, though it is not a highly sophisticated process, it does accomplish our required result.