the index file written onto other files. Occasionally, the

"catastrophic" crash is and the disk directory is

destroyed. For those without technical knowledge of

computers, the disk is then unusable. I run the program

only on copied disks where a problem will result only in

wasted time not lost work.

On small documents this program runs well, but its

inability to merge indexes precludes the obvious solution

of indexing smaller sections of a document and merging

the indexes afterwards. The Reference manual is an A5

ring-binder of 100 pages, clearly written, making good

use of examples and including a ‘Quick Start’ guide for

those who want to start indexing before reading through

the manual! The program costs about £130.

Conclusions

Indexing with microcomputers works well within

tightly defined areas. The text to be indexed has to be

available on a disk format readable by the computer

being used. I would think the chances of a freelance

indexer being given a computer-readable text are

minimal at present. The indexing commands must be

present in the body of the text. None of the programs I

have described is capable of building up a quality index

for a reference book without a great deal of subsequent

word processing. None of the programs builds a double-

column index; but a run through with the a word pro-

cessor can solve this.

The programs are easiest to use when indexing marks

are added as the work progresses. If a document is

written from the start with a view to computerized

indexing with one particular indexing program, then the

task of indexing can be reduced enormously. I index

and print such a marked-up text of as many as 800 pages

in one day, including the time required for tidying up the

generated index before printing. These programs do not

replace the skills of the indexer in deciding what should

or should not be indexed; but if changes are needed that

result in extra pages being inserted in the body of the

document, then running the indexing program again will

take care of the reindexing: in the past, revisions

resulting in extra or deleted paragraphs used to cause me

great anguish at the thought of the indexing task ahead.

Despite the various problems, I would rather work with

an indexing utility than without.  

‘Index’ is a public domain program written by Tom Jennings,

Boston, MA.

‘Documate/Plus’ is a trademark of the Orthocode Cor-

poration.

‘Siarindex’ and ‘Wordstar’ are trademarks of MicroPro Inter-

national Corporation.

Paul Hardy is Managing Director of Bushcat Technical

Software Ltd, Keighley, W. Yorkshire

Data protection and the indexer

A. Sandison

In the previous issue of this journal J. Eric Davies

provided a most useful general summary1 of the

provisions of this Act, which all UK indexers using

computers would be wise to read. I should like in this

brief article to concentrate on those provisions especially

relevant to freelance workers, to small businesses, and

to those who index for fun.

Index preparation

There is one most important Section of the Act which

Davies described as exempting ‘word processing’. The

Section concerned, 1 (8), says that ‘any operations

performed only for the purpose of preparing the text of

documents’ are outside the Act. Its precise meaning can

be argued at length4. The Registrar’s attempt to clarify3

says that the preparation of a list of names and

addresses and using this to send out circulars is exempt,

but that updating the list if clients move house or change

their requirements is ‘the maintenance of an electronic

mailing list’, and that this is not text preparation and

must be registered. I refrain from comment on that

ruling.

But so far as indexers are concerned, I have (with the

permission of the Society of Indexers) put to him the

suggestions that:

— as the sole purpose of the index is for publication in

the book or serial, its initial preparation is exempt as

‘text preparation’ under 1 (8);

— if the index is retained in memory for editing for the

next edition, its sole purpose remains text prepara-

tion, and it remains exempt;

— these exemptions remain true whether the publica-

tion (often by someone else) is in hard copy, in

microform or in an electronic data base.

The Registrar’s Legal Adviser’s letter4 in reply said:

— I would expect that the processing operations

performed in the course of that work would be ‘only

for the purpose of preparing the text of documents’.  

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That being the case the indexer would not be 'holding' personal data within the meaning of the Act.

There seems therefore to be no need to register under the Data Protection Act the use of personal data only for book and serial index preparation. That does not of course mean that other activities may not have to be registered, such as using the computer to search the index for information about an individual.

Recreation or business

I have also been trying to seek clarification of the exemption under section 33 (1) for 'personal data held by an individual and concerned only with the management of his personal, family or household affairs, or held by him only for recreational purposes'. Indexing for fun here gets a second exemption. Keeping in a computer your personal business affairs as an employee, your tax returns, your Christmas card lists, and so on is also exempt. But if you start running a business, as freelance workers do, then those business affairs are not exempt, and must be registered if they involve personal details such as clients' addresses and the type of index they like to publish. If all your clients are companies and you hold no details of living individuals you do not hold personal data—but if there is one individual you do, even if it is yourself.

Other exemptions from registration

A mailing list can be exempt, but only if everyone on it has given permission for inclusion. Calculating salaries and keeping accounts to ensure that payments are made or received can also be exempt. But the actual exemptions are tightly worded and it would be unwise to rely on them without reading carefully the relevant clauses° (s.32-33) and the official guidance provided by the Registrar°.

There is one other non-exemption° (s.1(6) & 4(1)) of importance. If you lend your computer to anyone who uses it for a non-exempt purpose, you, the owner of the computer, have to register as a Computer Bureau.

If you think that you perhaps ought to register, ask at a Post Office for the registration forms and explanatory booklet: reread Davies' article¹ and perhaps ask the Registrar for his Guidelines® and Questions & Answers². Remember, you must have posted your application for registration, preferably by recorded delivery, before 11 May 1986 or before you start using your computer to process personal data.

Obligations under the Act

If you do have to register, certain statutory obligations are imposed upon you. The most important is that you must within 40 days tell anyone who writes to you, with adequate self-identification and a fee, whether you hold any data in your computer about him and if so what it is. You must also keep the Registrar informed if you change your address or any of the other particulars in your register entry.

The other obligations are general common sense in the handling of confidential information which everyone should observe whether they have to register or not. But the Act applies them equally to published or public data. They are that your data must be obtained lawfully and fairly; shall be used and disclosed only for the purposes for which you obtained it (as described in your register entry); shall be adequate, relevant, not excessive, accurate, kept up-to-date and not held longer than necessary for those purposes; and that appropriate security precautions shall be taken against unauthorized access, disclosure, alteration or destruction of the personal data.

References


VDTs and your health

The International Labour Organization's Advisory Committee on Salaried Employees & Professional Workers has adopted a set of 'Conclusions concerning occupational hazards and diseases in commerce and offices' that covers visual display terminals (VDTs). Among the conclusions summarized in Information retrieval and library automation 21 (5) Oct. 1985, 2-3, are that VDT users may experience 'visual strain, resulting in a series of symptoms, and fatigue and pain in postural and manipulative muscles; that a time limit should be put on intensive use of VDTs and that frequent breaks should be allowed for, as well as good provision being made for comfortable and convenient workstation furniture.' A report of the Committee's meeting and a complete set of the conclusions may be obtained from Cheryl Bush, CBEMA, 311 First Street, N.W., Suite 500, Washington, DC, 20001. Also noted are two articles on low-frequency electronic emissions from VDTs in Health Physics 45 (3) 1983 & 49 (3) 1985.