Indexing after the millennium 4
The next few years

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Sources of indexing materials

The merging and submerging of publishing companies, and the expansion of desktop publishing, are having an earthquake affect on where we will get work. A computer map is needed to keep track of who owns what divisions and imprints. Editors are disappearing overnight. The New York Times, June 29, 1998, reports publication of more books, fewer editors, and an increase in errors. Editors in New York City, the largest group of publishing professionals in the city, have decreased 16 percent from 3,218 to 2,714 in a very short period of time. Authors and author’s agents are now hiring freelance copy and text editors, and indexers.

Self-publishing is an accepted means of getting a book in print. It is no longer an isolated trend, or the product of a vanity press. (1) The term, “self-published,” appeared recently without depreciation, in reference to two new books in the New York Times. (2) An article in the Organization of American Historians (OAH) Newsletter was headlined (I am paraphrasing) HOW CAN I GET AHEAD WITHOUT GETTING MY WORK PUBLISHED? (3) Printing companies are getting manuscripts from institutions and agencies that prepare their own camera ready copy and send it to the printer for printing and binding. Indexing is done in-house or arranged for by printers.

These are markets for self-publishing which printers are prepared to take away from traditional publishers. Printers can turn out the product quickly and at a lesser cost. They provide proofreading, fulfillment (the shipping of orders), forms for copyright and permissions, and help with table of contents, etc. They refer authors to copy editors and indexers. Indexers will either write the index or consult with the authors helping them through the process themselves. There will be consultants to help authors with everything from producing camera ready copy to setting up a publishing company (tax deductible). They and printers will see the writer through from A to Z.

Thus, an ever increasing proportion of work will come to indexers directly from self-publishing public and private institutions: schools and colleges, insurance companies, government agencies, newsletter publishers, historical societies, museums, community activists groups, and health organizations. Law articles and related legal materials will be an important source of self-publishing. Medical and scientific material moves so quickly over the Internet that it is questionable how much will be published or self-published before it is overtaken by a newsworthy report of the next innovative experiment.

Indexers will get work by advertising in academic publications (college newspapers) and specialized periodicals and trade papers without even mentioning the word “self-published.” People will get the message.

Genealogy is growing. Even individuals, without a particular need, who have the wherewithal to get their work published without going through agents and publishers, will be a another source for indexers.

Indexing, the intellectual process

Indexing, the intellectual process of selecting words and phrases for subject headings, subheads, and cross-references, will not change.

You still need a brain to index. Indexing software will be upgraded in response to advancing computer technology. Internet indexing, as recounted by anyone who has used the search engines agree, is still a hit-and-miss project. We, as indexers, scorn dozens of undifferentiated references only to be met with thousands of undifferentiated hits on the Internet. It will take a growing army of indexers to keep up with the proliferating home pages and sites on the Internet. Indexers will be able to approach home page owners “cold” and find indexing work.

Technical changes in indexing

The mechanical means of receiving a manuscript or documents for indexing will never be the same. As the computer moved indexing from a handwritten or typewritten product in less than fifteen years, the modem and the scanner will move indexing in even less time. They will expand the amount of available indexable material and the way it is handled.

Automatic feed scanners now operate at a reasonable speed, with greater speed on the way. Prices are coming down daily. Scanners will become standard equipment for indexers. For the first time indexes in serials will be scanned into the computer, making them available for editing into master indexes without retyping. Past years of indexes and thousands of discrete and seemingly discrete articles and clippings will be scanned into the computer and edited. Data — conglomerations of loose corporate files or pictures of art items, as examples dashscanned in, will give knowledge a shape and structure online.

The index will make it a usable, cohesive retrievable assemblage of material. More than ever, skilled editors will be required to deal with language and usage changes; cross-references will be extensive.

Information about a specific subject almost as old as human history, scattered in libraries and laboratories all over the globe will be brought together, and made available in one place at one time, properly indexed. A new perspective of subject matter will result.

Important seminal research, long buried in scattered indexes, will be rediscovered, and examined in the light of current research. Changes in the design of scientific and social research and the study of human behavior will result. These new research tools will be successful because they will be written and edited by indexers who can and ill organize the material according to established principles of information retrieval.
The resulting product, if created by an indexer on speculation or by order of a publisher, will be saleable in print, CD-ROM or online.

As more information on the subject flows in it will be added and reproduced in the master index. These master indexes will be superior to the Internet which, despite the user’s knowledge of Boolean logic or “search hints” will never be accessible in its totality to the majority of people.

More manuscripts will come over the modem or on disk, going directly into the computer. They still have to be printed out for markup but they can be scanned back (scanners can now read handwriting) into the computer for indexing. Marked up page proof, scanned into the computer, is then taken over by the indexing program, or blocked and copied.

The marked up/scanned index can be copied onto a disk, given to another person to make specific index entries, i.e. names, places, or certain concepts.

Voice recognition programs will enable audio tapes, movies, and music to be entered into the computer for indexing without time-consuming transcription. It opens a whole new field of indexing. Entries read into the computer will become increasingly accurate and with it typing skills will decrease.

Technology moves the world. The information age is still in its infancy. The future belongs to people who can design, manage, and retrieve information. That’s us — THE INDEXERS!!

**Land of subtle connections**

*This excerpt from Orson Scott Card’s The originist echoes some of the more perceptive professional writings on indexing. The originist, a novella about family and community set, with Isaac Asimov's permission, in the milieu of his Foundation series, was part of the Hugo and Nebula award-winning author’s Maps in a Mirror series.*

“... Here’s the Golden Archway into Indexing. The Land of Subtle Conceptual Connections.”

Through the arch, it was as though they had passed into a completely different building. The style and trim were the same as before, with deeply lustrous fabrics on the walls and ceiling and floor made of the same smooth sound-absorbing plastic, glowing faintly with white light. But now all pretense at symmetry was gone. The ceiling was at different heights, almost at random; on the left and right there might be doors or archways, stairs or ramps, an alcove or a huge hall filled with columns, shelves of books and works of art surrounding tables where indexers worked ...

“The form fits the function,” said Zay.

“I’m afraid I’m rubbernecking like a first-time visitor to Trantor.”

“It’s a strange place. But the architect was the daughter of an indexer, so she knew that standard, orderly, symmetrical interior maps are the enemy of freely connective thought. The finest touch — and the most expensive too, I’m afraid — is the fact that from day to day the layout is rearranged.”

“Rearranged! The rooms move?”

“... Some days only one room is changed, moved off to some completely different place in the Indexing area. Other days, everything is changed. The only constant is the archway leading in. ...”

“But — the indexers must spend the whole morning just finding their stations.”

“Not at all. Any indexer can work from any station.”

“Ah. So they just call up the job they were working on the day before.”

“No. They merely pick up on the job that is already in progress on the station they happen to choose that day.”

“Chaos!” said Leyel.

“Exactly. How do you think a good hyperindex is made? If one person alone indexes a book, then the only connection that book will make are the ones that person knows about. Instead, each indexer is forced to skim through what his predecessor did the day before. Inevitably he’ll add some new connections that the other indexer didn’t think of. The environment, the work pattern, everything is designed to break down habits of thought, to make everything surprising, everything new.”

“To keep everybody off balance.”

“Exactly. Your mind works quickly when you’re running along the edge of the precipice.”

“By that reckoning, acrobats should all be geniuses.”

“Nonsense. The whole labor of acrobats is to learn their routines so perfectly they never lose balance. An acrobat who improvises is soon dead. But indexers, when they lose their balance, they fall into wonderful discoveries. That’s why the indexes of the Imperial Library are the only ones worth having. They startle and challenge as you read. All the others are just — clerical lists.”

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