Indexing after the millennium 7
Relieving information poverty

Judy Batchelor

Recalls the excitement and fears when computer indexing programs were developed, and looks forward to the use of technology to bring information to people worldwide.

Some years ago I wrote a short, semi-serious piece for this journal about the forthcoming joys and perils of indexing with a computer — at that time virgin land for most of us. Do you remember: when the shimmer of a screenful of text changing its format, or just the scrolling of text down past one’s eyes and off the bottom of the screen, had a sort of gala-day magic about it? how we revelled in the real emancipation of making seamless corrections and of being able to dart from entry to entry almost instantaneously? Do you remember how alien it was at first? (‘Oh dear,’ someone said at a hands-on demonstration of simple typing-onto-a-screen, ‘this is almost as tricky as getting money out of one of those holes in the wall.’)

I think many of us felt that whole portfolios of our mental capital were about to become valueless; but we were, all the same, determined to step bravely forward into the future as conscientious professionals, and to spend money, time and effort doing so. We would be small if worthy sparks from the computer — at that time virgin land for most of us. Do you remember: when the shimmer of a screenful of text changing its format, or just the scrolling of text down past one’s eyes and off the bottom of the screen, had a sort of gala-day magic about it? how we revelled in the real emancipation of making seamless corrections and of being able to dart from entry to entry almost instantaneously? Do you remember how alien it was at first? (‘Oh dear,’ someone said at a hands-on demonstration of simple typing-onto-a-screen, ‘this is almost as tricky as getting money out of one of those holes in the wall.’)

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