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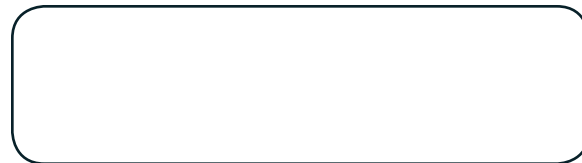
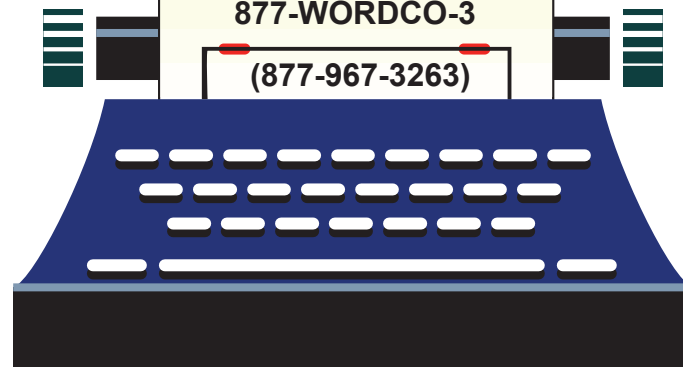
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We like hearing from you!

If you have any special concerns or questions, or have an idea for a future newsletter article, please contact Kathy at office@wordco.com

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Word from WordCo

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Indexing News

WordCo president and CEO **Stephen Ingle** recently participated in the DigitalBook2010 conference at the Javits Center in New York. (For complete details, see "DigitalBook2010" inside).

In May, **Steve** and indexing supervisor **Bill Morrison** attended the annual conference of the American Society for Indexing (ASI), held in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Highlights included workshops on "Indexing in InDesign" and "WordEmbed." Bill delivered a presentation on automating the creation of name indexes for social science books, and Steve took part on a panel focusing on "Getting Paid." The conference provides a great opportunity for indexers from all over the country (and indeed the world) to gather in one place and exchange ideas and share strategies. Next year's ASI conference will be held in Providence, Rhode Island.



Indexers at work. WordCo is America's largest on-site indexing service.

Accessing Information in Nonfiction Books

by Stephen Ingle, WordCo founder and president

In the previous issue of *Word from WordCo*, I looked at the future of (nonfiction) books, both print and electronic. While it seems that books in one form or another are here to stay, the way people access information within nonfiction books (and acquire knowledge) has changed and will continue to change.

Knowledge acquisition (i.e., learning) is a difficult and painstaking process, and until we have “instant learning” via digital implants (as portrayed in the popular film *The Matrix*), learning will continue to require time, discipline and focus. In-depth learning is classically represented by the student poring over a textbook, but other nonfiction texts (such as business books, cookbooks and handbooks) provide learning opportunities as well.

Let’s look more closely at textbooks. Clearly, textbooks are designed as learning tools. The information is presented in a logical fashion, with basic concepts at the beginning and more specialized, complex topics in subsequent chapters. One generally has to have mastered the material in earlier chapters in order to read and assimilate information in later chapters. With a typical print textbook, the student reads through and studies the text beginning with the first chapter. He or she may glance at the table of contents (TOC) or at the index, especially if they are interested in a particular topic. Some users may even peruse the index more closely to get a detailed overview of the book’s contents.

Successful etextbook publishers (and publishers of nonfiction ebooks in general) will understand, and incorporate, electronic means of locating information in their texts. How can publishers take full advantage of the digital potential when it comes to finding and assimilating information?

At the present time, most digital texts merely “reproduce” the print TOC or index, often as hyperlinks. Some publishers dispense with the index altogether, apparently reasoning that an index is not even necessary if users can find material via the “search” feature.

A detailed, hyperlinked TOC is certainly useful in that it provides an overview of the text. In some ebooks, TOC subsections are suppressed (i.e., you click on the “plus” sign to expand the display); this is an improvement over the standard print-book TOC. But a TOC is limited: it includes only what the author or editor included as chapter titles and section headings, and lists items by order of presentation rather than by topic or subtopic.

What about text and keyword searches? These are excellent tools when the user is looking for very specific information, e.g. “*Drosophila melanogaster*” in a biology book (assuming you can spell it correctly). This is a clear advantage of ebooks. Unfortunately, the resulting “hits” don’t provide more than local context (i.e., several lines of text preceding and following), and don’t necessarily let the user know if this is a major discussion vs. a passing mention, how long the



discussion is, and how this topic is related to other topics in the text.

So, what about indexes in ebooks? (I have to admit I’m slightly biased when it comes to this subject). Merely reproducing the (non-hyperlinked) index from the print version of the book is not very helpful. Believe it or not, such a “dead index” is fairly common in ebooks that are simply digitized print versions. Most users would be frustrated by the fact that they would have to manually navigate to the actual text page to find the reference, assuming an actual page number even exists.

A hyperlinked index (which may or may not include page locators), on the other hand, is much more useful and usable, and represents a qualitative improvement over TOC and text search. The user simply clicks on the index entry and is brought instantly to the relevant text page or specific location on the page. This is possible because the index entries are actually “embedded” in the electronic text

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Accessing Info:

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file. Again, the advantage of an electronic index over a TOC is that it provides an overview of the information presented in the text in the CONTEXT of other topics, and presents this information in a readily accessible format (alphabetically).

But to return to my original question: what is the *potential* of digital ebooks for revolutionizing the way people access information in nonfiction text, for revolutionizing the learning process?

As someone who has been involved in indexing for over two decades, I would venture to say there is definitely a need for a fully-electronic index or index-like tool in digital nonfiction books. Just because we haven’t seen it yet doesn’t mean it’s not coming. WordCo is currently working on a digital successor to the traditional index that will help readers focus on what is really important and thus facilitate the learning process. There has been a lot of talk in the industry about “enhancing” ebooks with extra features like audio and animated files, embedded definitions, links to outside websites, the ability to add electronic “post-it” notes, etc. Undoubtedly these can add value, but there is also the risk that too much will end up *distracting* the reader and *detracting* from the learning process. A digital index or index-like tool, on the other hand, can help *focus* the reader and *contribute* to learning. And therein lies its unique value.

Comments and feedback are welcome. Send responses to sringle@wordco.com.

DigitalBook2010

WordCo president and CEO **Steve Ingle** attended the DigitalBook2010 conference and Book Expo America in New York in late May. The conference, sponsored by the International Digital Publishing Forum (IDPF), brought together leaders in digital publishing to discuss and presented the latest trends in epublishing. IDPF is the body that promotes the epub format, which is the free and open standard for digital books and journals. Unlike pdf files, epub files “reflow” text, and thus are adaptable to a wide variety of formats, including iPad, iPod, and PC. Featured conference panelists included (among others) Garth Conboy from eBook Technologies, Peter Brantley from the Internet Archive, and Peter Balis from John Wiley & Sons. Key topics included the new 2.01 release of epub, maintaining content and design fidelity on different platforms, achieving “graceful degradation” to various digital platforms, and using etextbooks to improve the learning experience. The issue of including embedded video and audio files in a way that doesn’t distract the reader was also discussed.

DigitalBook2010 was held in conjunction with Book Expo America (BEA), a major book show with hundreds of exhibitors and dozens of authors, including celebrity authors like Jon Stewart, John Grisham, and Barbra Streisand. The mood was very upbeat, and the tectonic shift toward ebooks was unmistakable. A significant area of the floor

was designated a “Digital Book Zone,” with a plethora of vendors offering digitization services or the latest version of their ereader. Publishers are obviously scrambling to get their books into digital format if they aren’t already; if this material is already digitized, they are looking for ways to improve their product and stand out from the competition. Despite this overall trend, there were still thousands of print books on display, and the event as a whole was very inspiring to devotees of the written word!



WordCo street banner