

The CAPITAL INDEXER

Newsletter of the Mid- and South Atlantic Chapter of the American Society of Indexers

Volume 13, Number 3

www.indexing.com/msasi

December 2006

The Capital Indexer is published for and about the Mid- and South Atlantic Chapter of the American Society of Indexers.

2006–2007 Chair

Deborah Patton
8416 Elko Drive
Ellicott City, MD 21043
410 480-0997
dp@pattonindexing.com

Immediate Past Chair

Kate Mertes
118 North West Street
Alexandria VA 22314-2710
(703) 549-4574
kmertes@hotmail.com

Vice-Chair/Chair-Elect

Peggy Ruppel
17226 King James Way
Gaithersburg, MD 20877

Secretary

Jean Bray
540 South Church St. Unit 1
Shepardstown, WV 25443
304 876-0554
brayjwv@juno.com

Treasurer

Mauro Pittaro
6300 Bayberry Court, Apt 1103
Elkridge, MD 21075
917 882-3967
agma345@comcast.net

Newsletter

Jean Skipp
420 Spruce Drive
Exton, PA 19341
484-875-0603
includesindex@aol.com

Spring Programs

Technology drives our businesses, whether we freelance from home or work for an employer. We work more quickly (and therefore earn more) when we use can use our computer tools efficiently. To that end we will provide workshops for indexing software and for Windows computers. On February 24th and April 14th, we'll host several technology-related sessions. Scheduling some portions of these is still in the works. We'll be meeting at the Cadmus Communications offices in Columbia, MD. They publish medical journals and it's still "journal season" – the time of year when the annual cumulative indexes are completed to be published in the last issue of the year. Details about these sessions will come to you later.



Some things we know for sure. We'll meet at the Cadmus Communication offices in Columbia, MD at 9:30 am on February 24th and end about 1 pm after a box lunch. Kamm Schreiner will give a SKY Professional 6.0 workshop. He'll discuss more advanced features, but newbies are also welcome. If you have specific features you'd like to learn more about, please send those questions in advance either to me (Deborah Patton at msa@asindexing.org) or to Kamm at info@sky-software.com.

Also on February 24, Dave Ream will give a Cindex for Windows or Mac workshop. Again, newbies are welcome, but more advanced features will be covered too. Questions about specifics are welcome – please send them either to me or to Dave at DaveReam@LevTechInc.com.

We'll look more closely at how we work with computers. Gale Rhoades, the North American representative and support person for Macrex (dedicated indexing software) also provides general computer support to clients in the San Francisco Bay area and elsewhere. She will talk about how we can use our computers more efficiently to increase

productivity, which of course can only increase the bottom-line for our businesses.

We also will have a session on indexing in Microsoft Word using the add-on software DexTer. And we'll have a panel discussing websites for freelancers. How do they get it done? How do they maintain them?

Details about these sessions (scope and date) will follow.

LOCATION: Cadmus Communications, 8621 Robert Fulton Drive, Suite 100, Columbia, MD 21046, Phone: 800-257-5529 (toll free), 410-850-0500

Chapter Volunteers

We wouldn't exist without our volunteers. Our thanks go to a number of people who have served for some time and have or will relinquish their services soon. At the same time, if you see a role you could take over for the chapter, we'd love to hear from you.

Julia Marshall has kept track of our member directory that we post on our website. She did this by contacting all chapter members and collecting their information into a Microsoft Access database. Julia now has a full-time job and has resigned from this job.

Jean Skipp has produced our newsletter, *The Capital Indexer* since August 2004. She receives copy by email, prepares it for printing, produces the mailing labels and takes it all to the Post Office. She'll relinquish this job in May.

Lisa Costello worked as our chapter webmaster and then handed the reins to Matt White of Coughling Indexing. Matt has recently taken another job. Clearly knowledge of HTML is a talent these two brought to this job.

Jean Bray has been our Chapter Secretary and Mauro Pittaro has been our Chapter Treasurer for the last two years. Their terms will end in May.

Kate Mertes, Dick Evans, and Enid Zafran have been spearheading our usability study.

They aren't done yet, but I want to thank them too. See Kate's summary elsewhere in this newsletter.

Becky Hornyak and Sue Nedrow have hosted DineArounds in northern Virginia over the last couple of years. These casual gatherings never got off the ground, though they tried several times.

Maria Coughlin has graciously hosted our chapter website as a subdirectory of her website for some years now. We're now exploring getting our own chapter domain name and webhost and moving the site there. More on that to come.

Thank you all so much! We couldn't have done it without you.

ASI's affiliation with Amazon.com

One way to generate revenue for ASI is amazingly easy. Whenever you make any book, electronic or other purchases at Amazon.com, begin your shopping at the link on the ASI home page (www.asindexing.org) to "Buy Books!" By using the Amazon.com link, Amazon.com will return a portion of your eligible purchases to ASI without costing you any extra money. The other link in "Buy Books!" will take you to the Information Today site where members can buy ASI publications at a discount but it is not affiliated with the Amazon.com program.

Membership Corner

Hello to all of you who joined ASI and our chapter this year. The indexing community is a relatively small one. We are working on ways to improve communication among us, but in the meantime, I remind you that you can find other ASI members close to you in the ASI member directory on the website (www.asindexing.org) by clicking on "Search our person membership directory" and putting your location in either City, State, or Zip. It's always permissible for newbie indexers to contact experienced indexers and vice versa.. We all like to chat about how we work. I learn from others indexers just about every time I talk with someone. Just seeing where all you new members are from gets me interested in what you're working on. Welcome!

Tanja Bekhuis, TCB Research and Indexing,
Boalsburg, PA
Irene Bruce, Rockville, MD
(Mary) Beth Butler, Ellicott City, MD
Patricia C. Carlson, Alexander Street Press, LLC,
Arlington, VA
Liz Coehlo, Coughlin Indexing, Annapolis, MD
Monika Devay, National Library of Medicine,
Bethesda, MD
Adrienne Davis, The ERIC Project, Temple Hill,
MD
Brenda Dickus, Cadmus Communications,
Columbia, MD
Paula C. Elsey, History4All, Inc., Chantilly, VA
Lydia Fraser, Germantown, MD
Amy Hall, Amethyst Harbor, Inc., Rockville, MD
Dianne Hosmer, Towson, MD
Suzi Kaplan, Bethesda, MD

Sandra Keefer, Chesapeake, VA
Donald Kerper, Egg Harbor, NJ
Jackie Kinder, Fairfax, VA
Amit Maitra, SATLINK Communications, Vienna,
VA
David Mullen, Baltimore, MD
Mary Beth Papciak, Pittsburgh, PA
Sandra K. Perez, Concept Technology, Fairfax
Station, VA
Marlae Schnare, Burke, VA
Nina Seebeck, One Hundred Proof Editorial
Services LLC, Centreville, VA
Eddie VanArsdall, Arlington, VA (technical
writer)
Roger Vincent, Rocky Mount, NC
Cathy Womack, Barefoot Boy Indexing Services,
Columbia, MD

About Chapter Membership

Membership in one ASI Chapter is free with your ASI membership, but you have to remember to check your choice of chapter when you renew your membership. One benefit to the chapter of you doing that is the Chapter Allotment of \$5 per chapter member from the national office to us. You may join other chapters for an additional \$5.

Usability Study Update 12/15/2006

by Kate Mertes

Our chapter has been working on the development of a modular usability study for about ten months now. While we all make assumptions about what makes an index usable, what do we really know about how readers use indexes? There are not many studies, and those that have been undertaken have not necessarily studied usability in detail, nor have they gathered statistically broad amounts or types of data. Our aim is to design a study format that can be

applied to a wide variety of usability questions, that can isolate and study detailed usability issues, and that is quick and easy to administer. In time, we want to develop a usability format that not only our chapter, but other chapters can use, creating a database of usability results. That way, when a publisher says to an indexer, for example, “What’s wrong with using run-in style? It saves space,” the indexer should be able to back up his or her argument for indented style with hard data.

At our first full-scale meeting on this matter in the spring of 2006, Dick Evans, a chapter member who has conducted usability studies, gave us a presentation. Dick told us that the first thing we needed to do was to find and refine a “golden index.” What’s a golden index? There’s a bit of disagreement over this, but I think it’s more one of semantics than of practicality. Dick defines a golden index as one which follows all existing indexing rules – which is, in some sense, a “perfect” index. To study an aspect of usability, one then makes a single change to that “perfect” index, such as changing the cross-reference rules, in order to study what works best. The idea is that, if one can restrict the number of variables affecting testing, than changes in usability can be attributed to the variant introduced.

This makes great statistical sense, but of course the problem is that (a) all indexes have exceptions; (b) indexers are not in total agreement about what “the rules” actually are; and (c) if we were in agreement, we probably wouldn’t need a usability study! So the concept of a “golden index” is not entirely reliable. As Dick pointed out in his spring presentation, when he tried to do a usability study with what he thought was a pretty golden index, it turned out that something he’d never thought of as problematic – the three-column format – was a real problem for users. So part of the process of studying usability is to do quite a bit of preliminary testing of the golden index itself, before introducing any variables.

But first one has to locate a text, and an index, that can even begin to be a potential golden index. It has to be something that’s not too long and complicated, but that has sufficient features that it will prove reliably plastic for study purposes. It helps if the text itself has some intrinsic interest for a wide range of readers. It’s a good idea to have the publisher’s blessing to use the published text. And, of course, one has to have access to the index so it can be manipulated for study purposes. I looked at and rejected a number of texts. Some were too simple; others involved heavy, long, and expensive texts; others had an encyclopedic format that reduced usability features; and some were just boring. Finally I located a text that I thought might be a good subject. It was on Native American dress, had gorgeous pictures, an interesting topic, and a fairly complex index, but was not too long (under 200 pages). Due to the vagaries of publication the index was worked on by a number of persons, of which I was one, but I had access to and control of the final product. I also obtained permission from The National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), The Smithsonian Institution, and HarperCollins to use the text and index for usability studies. The book, called *Identity by Design*, will be published in March 2007 to accompany an exhibition at NMAI that opens in the same month.

Our chapter meeting in November, 2006 was intended to vet the index. I was more than certain that the existing index would need to be tweaked, but would other people feel it could be turned into a “golden index?” We had a very solid crowd of 23 attendees. Copies of the current index and the proofs of the text were handed around, in both paper and electronic form, and we all settled down to doing what indexers just love to do: critique an index. Everyone came up with

interesting, cogent, and sometimes surprising perspectives. In the end it was agreed that this index could indeed serve as a golden index for usability study purposes, and we collected a list of fixes to be made to the current index to bring it in line with what we all agree on in terms of proper indexing rules. My aim now is to, in fact, produce two “golden indexes:” one which retains the existing detail (the current index is pretty baroque for such a short text) and one which is far simpler and more typical.

Attendees at the November meeting also agreed on two things that we’d like to test first:

Generic cross-references

(Example: beads and beading. *See also* specific types)

Do users actually find these helpful – or just frustrating? Are they useful in some circumstances, but not in others?

Undifferentiated page references

(Example: Myers, Keri Jhane, 18, 19, 54, 80, 81, 90, 91, 109, 123, 132, 140, 151)

This is practically the first thing indexers are taught NOT to do. But how much does it actually bother readers? Is there an optimal number for undifferentiated locators? Will they find information more rapidly with subheads? Is too much analysis a problem in itself?

But first we have to produce what we think are good iterations of the golden index. In mid-January I hope to circulate to the attendees at the November meeting revised versions for further vetting, and eventually we’ll get a version up on the Website. After that? We’ll have to start designing the test procedure. As any statistician will tell you, HOW you ask the question is crucial.

Upcoming Events

Saturday, January 20, 2007
TAXES: What Every Entrepreneur and
Consultant Needs To Know
Speaker: Jina Etienne, CPA
The Capital PC Users Group
<http://entrepreneur.cpcug.org/107meet.html>

March 22-26, 2007
IA Summit 2007:
Enriching IA
Rich Information, Rich Interaction, Rich
Relationships
Las Vegas, NV
<http://www.asist.org>

May 23-27, 2007
American Society of Indexers (ASI)
Annual Meeting

Crowne Plaza Hotel--Center City
Philadelphia, PA
www.asindexing.com

June 1-3, 2007
American Booksellers Association
Annual Meeting
Jacob Javits Convention Center
New York City, NY
www.bookexpoamerica.com

July 13-16, 2007
Society of Indexers
Annual Conference
50th Anniversary Conference
Roehampton
London, England
<http://www.indexers.org.uk>

Name the Newsletter Contest

With a new chapter name we need a new chapter persona. During the 1980s, members of the Washington, DC Chapter of ASI came up with *The Capital Indexer* moniker. It's a good one. However, the scope of our chapter has been far beyond Washington, DC for a long time. We need a new masthead for our newsletter and for our website. It may be a graphic design or a slogan, but we need your ideas. What should we be? Please send your ideas by email or U.S. Mail by February 15 to Deborah Patton, chapter chair, at msa@asindexing.org or 8416 Elko Drive, Ellicott City, MD 21043.

Sponsor an issue of this newsletter (donation of \$100 requested) and we'll put your business card, poetry, birth certificate, handprint, whatever you'd like on the back cover. Your donation will help with the costs of printing and mailing *The Capital Indexer*. Can't budget funds to sponsor an issue? If you'd still like to help, please consider an **online subscription** to *The Capital Indexer*. You'll receive an e-mail notification when the latest issue is placed on the chapter web site instead of a printed version.



Mid- and South Atlantic Chapter
of the American Society of Indexers
c/o Jean Skipp
IncludesIndex
420 Spruce Drive
Exton, PA 19341