

SI publishing technology group

Who's Afraid of ePublications?

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the pace of change

Ebook vendors ... have millions of reader/customers... happy with EPUB 2 display capabilities and devices... While publishers wait for eReader device manufacturers to add new features... eBook sellers are just as happy to wait.

Dave Bricker, quoted by:

Who's pushing for innovation in the ebook space? Publishers? No, they're fairly content with quick-and-dirty p-to-e conversions... Retailers? Nope. If retailers were motivated we'd see much broader adoption of EPUB 3 in the various readers and apps...

Joe Wickert, O'Reilly Tools of Change Conference, 2012

Many academic publishers see the future as still predominantly page-based, with PDFs served online

the three phases of indexing

1 Implicit trust

neither reader nor indexer can search the text
the only alternatives to index use are the ToC and skimming

2 The Golden Age

we have the searchable text but the reader doesn't

3 Sudden nakedness

the reader has a searchable text as well as our index!

there are at least three uses for an index

- bookshop browsing (and Amazon's look inside)
which title covers my chosen subject most thoroughly?
- retrospective reference
where did I read that really good explanation, quotation or joke about X?
- while reading
is X dealt with or explained elsewhere?
but we're now challenged by detailed contents pages and internal cross-references as well as by the web.

but surely any index is better than no index?

I don't think so because:

- finding there's no index might leave the reader wishing that one had been provided

but

- finding a bad index will leave the reader wishing for an alternative

...and these days, there is one!

what's the appropriate level of granularity?

Page numbers are dreadful, and often the reader can't even be sure that they're on the right one. Even without the advent of unpaginated texts, they're way past their sell-by date

- Paragraphs are easy, but not always more precise than a page

what's the appropriate level of granularity?

- Paragraphs are easy, but not always more precise than a page
- but, what is the indivisible unit of human comprehension?
- The sentence!

We should be insisting on it...

are we all doomed?

From today, painting is dead

- Paul Delaroche, on seeing a daguerreotype photograph in 1839

Photography brought a lot to painting because it forced artists to think about what painting could do that photography couldn't

- John Lanchester, *The Guardian*, 2013

so, what do we bring to retrieval that computers can't?

are we all doomed?

- We will not future-proof our careers by learning to program (as Nic Gibson recommended)
- We might future-proof our careers by providing what computers cannot

because, if computers *can* provide it, why would anyone go on using a slow, costly, error-prone human indexer?

are we all doomed?

- we need to be able to make a case... an informed case
- we need to be prepared to question our clients
- we mustn't destroy our credibility by overstating our skills
- PTG alone can't achieve much
- every commission each of you takes and every index you deliver subtly affects the future of the profession

are we all doomed?

As ever, poor quality and lack of evidence for adding value - not new technology - are the principal threats we need to address

On new technology, we've actually been here before and not just survived but prospered

are we all doomed?

On new technology, we've actually been here before and not just survived but prospered

When shoe-boxes and slips ruled, the PC must have looked like a threat; instead, it's liberated us from drudgery, to concentrate on the intellectual side of indexing.

Who would seriously want to go back?

are we all doomed?

Like the PC, the ebook is an opportunity, not a threat

- It may liberate us from crude page indications to offering precise locations and unambiguous analyses of meaning
- Comparing indexes with search may – indeed should – demonstrate our creativity and worth

but

- we need to assert our preparedness. We need to be able to make a case. The twentieth century is not coming back...

are we all doomed?

- there's no guarantee that the good will drive out the bad
- there's no guarantee that indexers will still be around in ten years' time
- there's no guarantee that indexing will continue to provide a worthwhile main income